



PlayStation

JULY 2010

The Official Magazine

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

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59
GAME
BLOWOUT

Star Wars: The Force
Unleashed 2
MGS Peace Walker
ModNation Racers
Prince of Persia
Kane & Lynch 2
Guitar Hero 6
Castlevania
Split/Second
Crysis 2
Rage
F.3.A.R.



Mom knows best...or does she? p.60





PS3
PlayStation 3



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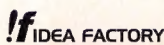


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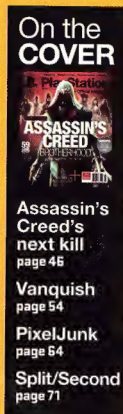
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Killer Move

This is how you do multiplayer right. Now, I haven't personally played Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood—our trusted reporter had to brave the cold Canadian winds to bring us back our world-exclusive feature. But from what he told me, from what I've read in his riveting report, and from what I know after gathering my own intel while skulking around Ubisoft HQ, Brotherhood is on track to be a stunning example of a multiplayer extension, bringing its single-player action into a bigger arena in a way that respects both the game's unique mechanics and rich storyline.

This is also the right way to ramp up a franchise's production schedule. Borrowing a page from Activision's Call of Duty model (their release model, not their harm-handed-choking-of-the-golden-goose-known-as-Infinity Ward model), Ubisoft is planning to always have multiple Assassin's Creeds in development, possibly releasing a new game every year. Sometimes that will mean a

new assassin; other times we'll return to a former killer. Sometimes we'll get a full 20-plus-hour solo mission; other times we'll get a dozen-hour extension (still a whole lot of solo gameplay!) with new multiplayer modes. I like it.

I also like this issue, if I do say so myself. Every time we put another PTOM to bed, I marvel at what our team has produced. From our incredible preview lineup to our diverse assortment of features to our hard-hitting reviews, we aim to provide you the best insight into everything that matters on your PlayStation platform. But never forget: this is your magazine. Keep sending us your letters telling me what you think—good or bad—or just follow me on Twitter and share your thoughts directly. Enjoy!

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief

www.twitter.com/TinyManRages



The Team



GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

In the time it takes to read this biography, Editor in Chief Gary Steinman will have mediated yet another peace settlement in the Middle East and saved 40 orphans from a horrible crushing. Dr. Phil sometimes asks him for advice. We're just saying, is all...

NOW PLAYING: Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands, Nier, Split/Second



GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Somewhere over the rainbow but well below expectations lies the enigmatic jug-band hero Greg Orlando. Vegas odds suggest he may never make it to the finals of the World Series of Sock Puppetry—if he knows what's good for him.

NOW PLAYING: ModNation Racers, Dead to Rights: Retribution



KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Monster of artwork Ken Bousquet provides shade from the sun, respite from the wind, and safe harbor from mimics. His fierce and unrepentant Shaolin soccer style defeats your silly crane-fu technique again and again. Yes it does.

NOW PLAYING: MLB 10: The Show, 2010 FIFA World Cup, Split/Second



ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Having forgotten none in a three-day period than most people remember in a lifetime, our ardent Managing Editor Roger Burchill has begun his quest to become a yogi. Spiritual enlightenment is sure to follow once his knotted limbs are untangled.

NOW PLAYING: Backbreaker, LEGO Star Wars, Uncharted 2, Split/Second



SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Having accomplished his lifelong dream of applying cherries to the world's third-largest ice cream sundae, sweater-vest enthusiast Scott Butterworth is searching for a new purpose in life. First up? Defeat Greg in the World Series of Sock Puppetry.

NOW PLAYING: Skate 3, Super Street Fighter IV, Green Day: Rock Band



THE DAVID MURPHY
EDITORIAL INTERN

Knighted through for meritorious service by the Burger King, young intern Daniel "David" Murphy would be remembered for his many charitable acts, if we didn't already fondly recall him as that really tall guy who loves soup. No man like him for eating soup.

NOW PLAYING: Iron Man 2, Final Fantasy XIII, Nier, ModNation Racers

PlayStation

The Official Magazine

EDITORIAL

EDITOR IN CHIEF Gary Steinman
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Greg Orlando
MANAGING EDITOR Roger Burchill
ASSISTANT EDITOR Scott Butterworth
INTERIM DAVID MURPHY
EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS Chris Antalis, Tony Barrett, James Coates, Jason D'Aprile, Dan DiLiscio, Carolyn Gudmundson, Andy Kelly, Nathan Meunier, Douglass C. Perry, Mike Reparez, Evan Sharmoon, David F. Smith, Steve Tilly
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Stephen Pierce

ART

ART DIRECTOR Ken Bousquet
DESIGNER Christi Chin
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Chris Imlay

BUSINESS

PUBLISHER Kristen Salvatore
khsalvatore@futureus.com
GROUP PUBLISHER Kelley Corten
kcorten@futureus.com
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTEGRATED SALES Nate Hunt
415-589-5406, nhunt@futureus.com
NATIONAL SALES MANAGER - KEY ACCOUNTS Isaac Ugay
649-300-0767, hugay@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR Carol Gifford
646-723-5476, cgifford@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER Art S. Germain
650-338-2571, agermain@futureus.com
DETROIT CONSUMER MANAGER Alan Dickinson
248-792-2408, alandmcd@comcast.net
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Allyson Karda
659-745-2929, akarda@futureus.com
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR Heidi Hapin
hhapin@futureus.com
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER Andrea Reolo-Ang
areolo-ang@futureus.com

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Michael Hollister
PRODUCTION MANAGER Larry Briseno
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR Jennifer Lim

CONSUMER MARKETING

VICE PRESIDENT SALES & MARKETING Rachelle Considine
DIRECTOR CONSUMER MARKETING Rich McCarthy
COORDINATOR MANAGER Stephanie Blake
NEWSSTAND DIRECTOR Bill Shewey
CONSUMER MARKETING OPERATIONS DIRECTOR Lisa Radler
BUSINESS MANAGER Eriq Kiger
SR. ONLINE CONSUMER MARKETING MANAGER Jennifer Trinken
CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER Mike Frascia

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PRESIDENT John Marcom
VICE PRESIDENT/GEO John Sutton
HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR Nancy Durluster DuBois

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FUTURE PLC

20 Broomfield St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1223 422424
www.futureplc.com

NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

Roger Parry
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Steve Savory
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR John Bowman

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THE TEN

Stories that everyone's talking about

The Force is Strong in this One

Vader's apprentice rises again

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Fight's on!

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More War

Did you really think Kratos was done?


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Scott and Greg can't hide their differences

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1 Deus Ex Returns

It's time for the *Human Revolution*

The revolution will be televised on PlayStation 3 when Square Enix revives the popular *Deus Ex* franchise later this year.

"*Deus Ex: Human Revolution* takes place during a time of tremendous technological advancement that also brings with it some very serious concerns," says *Revolution's* game director Jean-Francois Dugas. "One of these significant breakthroughs is human augmentation, and specifically, mechanical augmentations. For the first time in history, humans are able to literally merge with technology to increase everything from brain power and problem-solving ability to brute strength. Predictably, there are people in society who are for and against these kinds of changes and that undercurrent of struggle and the fear of the unknown hangs over the entire game."

Players won't need to know what has come before; *Revolution* serves as a prequel to both *Deus Ex* (2000) and its 2003 sequel *Deus Ex: Invisible War*.

What sets *Revolution* apart from its more straightforward brethren is its notion of a malleable protagonist and also plot elements wherein a player's choices affect the storyline. Security officer Adam Jensen (pictured here) can augment his abilities with mechanical upgrades, increasing his speed, strength, stealth abilities, and more. In this way, it's possible to tailor the hero to a favored play style. Moral choices, in turn, allow Jensen to define his experience.

Revolution will have a mix of straightforward and open-ended levels. "With the open-ended ones, non-linearity is key," Dugas says. "Although you'll always know what your critical mission is, gamers who like to explore will be rewarded with additional experience points or equipment." Players can also uncover missions that a gamer who only stayed on the critical path would miss.

"On top of that is another layer: multi-solution gameplay," Dugas says. "Whether through additional exploration, utilizing a special augmentation, talking to someone, hacking a computer, or going in guns blazing, you can often complete objectives with whatever style of gameplay you prefer."



2 Meet the girl who makes Madison sexy



Heavy Rain motion capture star Jacqui Ainsley talks stunts, bumps, and catsuits with PTOM

In *Heavy Rain*, we lived through every one of fearless photojournalist Madison Paige's experiences with her—and it was pretty grueling. So we had no trouble sympathizing with model Jacqui Ainsley, the motion capture actress who supplied the face and body of Ms. Paige: She had to act out everything that Madison ends up doing on screen, and it was almost as tough for Ainsley as it is for her character.

"I remember [David Cage] asking, 'Are you sporty?' Because this is going to be very physical," explains Ainsley. "But I wasn't aware of quite how physical that was." For Madison to take a beating in the opening scene, Ainsley would have to as well: "The motion capture suit has the sensors in your boniest places because they're what makes your virtual skeleton, and falling and fighting time after time means that those places are impacted over and over again." It was an extreme level of performance like nothing she'd experienced before. "I was quite often black and blue. Trying to continue modeling alongside that was tricky sometimes!"

Acting in the Raw

The sexy stuff, though, didn't mirror the game's action nearly as closely. For a start, Ainsley wasn't

even naked: "[The sex scene] was funny because of the logistics of it. We were in these catsuits with the Velcro sensors, and there wouldn't be any friction or anything getting in the way. There were lots of funny moments." And she stresses that many of Madison's naked moments are more dramatic than titillating. "The striptease scene is less sexy and more of a violent scene really, because she's being held at gunpoint." Our thoughts exactly (*ahem*). She didn't end up being the

voice of Madison ("I did a West Coast accent, and they really wanted East Coast") but she says that she still feels incredibly close to the character: "Madison's young, she's career-driven, she's very dedicated to people she loves. All those things I'd like to say about myself as well." And in the end, Ainsley enjoyed performing the action parts of the role so much, she's considering putting together her own stunt portfolio. "[*Heavy Rain*] was above and beyond my expectations," she says. "I really did love every minute of it."

"The sex scene was funny because of the logistics of it. We were in these catsuits with the Velcro sensors."



FLY AINSLEY

While she nurtures her stunt woman dreams, Jacqui Ainsley continues to do modeling work as well as appearing in adverts—you can currently see her as one of the outrageously gorgeous air hostesses in a Virgin Atlantic promo and a sexy lady for L'Oréal's products. But more importantly than any of that, her CV includes the ultimate gold seal of attractiveness: she's been a Bond girl. (You can spot her in the credits to *Die Another Day*—she's the one covered in fire.)



3 Starstruck

The Force Unleashed 2 answers the question: Can death stop a Jedi?

What Came Before

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (September 2008)

It was a bad time to be a rebel or a Jedi. Mean old Mr. Vader took to training a secret apprentice, Galen Marek aka Starkiller, in the ways of the Force, and then set him loose upon the galaxy.

Utilizing two impressive graphics technologies, *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* turned the safeties off, allowing Starkiller to juggle a Star Destroyer, huck TIE fighters, and tear the hell out of slaving Rancor monsters. Digital molecular matter allowed for the destruction and manipulation of items in a realistic way: glass shattered, stone crumbled, steel bent and twisted. Its counterpart *Euphoria* imbued all the in-game enemies with a functioning central nervous system that enabled them to react to external stimuli, meaning they flailed realistically, grabbed at items to right themselves, and would try to seize any nearby railings to avoid being knocked into a void by a blast of Force energy.

Starkiller, unleashed on the galaxy, sought to kill Jedi for Vader. He found a love interest in pilot Juno Eclipse, and a robotic companion in Proxy. Eventually, the Jedi repented of his evil ways and aided the fledgling rebel alliance. This put him into direct conflict with Darth Vader and the evil emperor, Palpatine, and Starkiller met his demise at their hands.





What Comes Next

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 2
(Q4 2010)

Death, where is thy sting? Starkiller, showing the plucky, can-do attitude of comic book characters and horror movie villains, will not let his status as a cadaver deter him. He's returning as the protagonist in LucasArts' *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 2*.

"We knew at the beginning of *Force Unleashed 2* we wanted to bring back Starkiller," says Hayden Blackman, the game's executive producer. "We kicked around some other ideas, but ultimately we're very attached to Starkiller as a character.

We thought we could build an entire franchise around him, and continue to tell stories in this time period. So our first order of business was to tackle how we'll bring him back."

Blackman reveals *Unleashed 2* begins with Darth Vader traveling to Kamino, the watery world where the Army of the Republic clones were created in the *Star Wars* prequel films. Vader lands at a secret facility where Starkiller—alive, but not well—is in chains. "Vader tells Starkiller he is a clone," Blackman says. "Starkiller is very confused. His memory is fractured, his emotions are raging, he doesn't know who he really is. Everything from the real Starkiller's life

seems to be just a hazy dream, and Vader really preys on this."

In rebellion, Starkiller flees, searching for his love Eclipse and stealing Vader's personal TIE fighter in the process. His journey takes him from Kamino to Cato Neimodia to the cave of evil on Dagobah. In the cave, he'll be confronted by visions as Luke Skywalker was, and one of those visions will suggest he's been had: It's not possible to clone a Jedi. Were such insanity possible, the Clone Wars would have been fought exclusively with lightsabers. The answer to this conundrum, of course, will be resolved when the Force is again unleashed, later this year.

↑ POWER TRIP

Young Starkiller has expanded his skills for *The Force Unleashed 2*. Where he used to wield one lightsaber, now he carries two. But that's barely a bullet point on a features list.

"We are introducing new powers," Blackman says. "We have a Jedi mind trick which will be re-envisioned in an unleashed mode; it will allow enemies to target other enemies with a really high rate of fire. They will attack relentlessly for a brief period of time and then they'll explode in a glory of Force energy."

"We also have Force Fury, which is an overpower or super-Force mode," he says. "When you go into Force Fury, all your powers will be totally amped up. You'll have brand-new combos; your lightning, which might hit a small group, will now hit almost everybody on screen; your Force push, which hits somebody like a cannonball, will now send them out to orbit."



HEROES UNMASKED

Hulk, Wolverine, Iron Man, Ryu, Morrigan, and Chris Redfield have all been confirmed, and Capcom's promotional artwork hints at such characters as Chun-Li, Frank West, the Super-Skrull, Dr. Doom, Deadpool, and Captain America.

4

It's Mahvel, baby!

The fighting game renaissance rolls on with the announcement of *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds*

Capitalizing on the momentum of the successful *Street Fighter IV* and the fantastically popular re-release of *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* on PSN last year, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds* will once again pit Marvel's stable of iconic superheroes against Capcom's most beloved characters in a wildly over-the-top fighting spectacle.

This time around, we can expect a lot more than recycled sprites. The entire game is being built from the ground up on the same technology powering *Resident Evil 5* and *Lost Planet 2*. It also features an all-new art style resembling a living comic book, complete with dark, dramatic shading, and contains prologues and epilogues for every character.

Who will appear in the game? And what about the gameplay? Unfortunately, Capcom refuses to divulge details. However, it has revealed the current roster is 30 characters strong and growing—with several newly added characters mixed in with the more familiar crowd—and the gameplay will retain all of the “highlights” (think Hyper Combos) of *MvC2*'s combat, though Capcom wouldn't confirm whether or not the game would still focus on three-man fighting teams. The combat commences in spring 2011.

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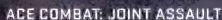
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After being grounded for what
forbidden years, the jet fighter army
game is ready for take-off in 2010



The entire story campaign features co-op for up to four players (via ad-hoc or infrastructure). Certain missions allow all four players to fly side by side while others will split the squad and task each player with completing separate objectives that will affect their teammates' games. Of course, for those who prefer to blow their friends out of the sky, *Joint Assault* also offers competitive multiplayer modes for up to eight players.

Unlike previous *Ace Combat* games, *Joint Assault* features real-world locations, including major cities like London, Tokyo, and San Francisco. Naturally, there'll be a hangar full of licensed real-world aircraft as well.



TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X 2

Tom Clancy's first foray into the highflying world of aerial combat proved only moderately successful, but Ubisoft clearly sees more potential in *H.A.W.X*'s fast-paced mix of realistic settings and arcade gameplay. Here's what we can expect from the second PS3 fly-by coming this fall:

As a member of a super elite squadron with expert training and access to sophisticated prototype technology, we'll be among the most select pilots around. The Solid Snake of the skies, so to speak. That means engaging in a range of white-knuckle combat scenarios, including taking off while under fire, carrier night-landings, and intense dogfights in aircraft that, according to most governments, don't actually exist yet. This all takes place within a "richly detailed storyline" that will include real-world locations such as Moscow, the Arctic Circle, and the Persian Gulf, all painstakingly recreated using high-resolution satellite imagery.

The devs also revealed that the Enhanced Reality System from the original—which provided players with various forms of flight assistance—will return, though specifics on its new capabilities remain classified.

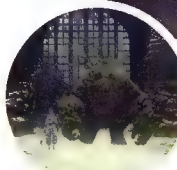
6 Odd Couple

We take an in-depth look at the unlikely heroes of *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom*

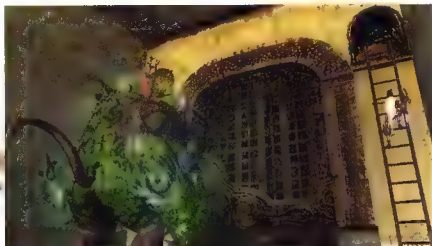
A wiry, amnesiac thief and a lumbering, dim-witted beast might seem like a mismatch, but their strengths play off each other in a platform/puzzle/adventure reminiscent of the PS2's *Ico*. Their adventure begins in the middle of an overgrown temple that seems abandoned save for the occasional group of oily-looking demonic guardsmen. Tepeu the thief has no choice but to begin exploring and, with Majin in tow, the two set off on a quest to find out more about their murky pasts and the fate that befell the kingdom that confines them. All will be revealed when Namco Bandai releases the game this summer.



↑ **MAJIN THE GENTLE GIANT** Chuddlike Majin isn't directly controllable, but obeys Tepeu without question. For example, Tepeu can lure enemies to a specific area and signal a hidden Majin to knock over a wall and crush them.



← **100% ORGANIC KINGDOMS** Real kingdoms aren't divided into levels or chapters, and neither is the *Forsaken* one. Explore freely, but certain areas will remain impassible until power-ups are acquired.

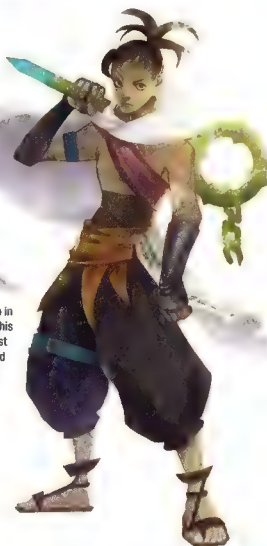


↑ **TEAMWORK** Environmental puzzles like destructible walls and complex locked doors litter their path, and the duo must cleverly use each other's strengths to solve them. Tepeu can move soundlessly and squeeze into small spaces while Majin is best at brute force.



← **STEALING AWAY** Vulnerable to enemies when separated from Majin, the thief must use stealth to avoid detection. Tepeu can also set up diversions like small explosions to distract enemies.

→ **TEPEU THE THIEF** Tepeu initially finds Majin chained up in a cell, where, separated from his magical powers, the poor beast had been waiting for a hundred years to be rescued. Indebted to Tepeu for his release, Majin becomes a powerful ally.



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7

Seeing Red

Editor Greg Orlando spouts off on bleeding out and breaking down



My name is Greg Orlando, and I endorse this message: Dying sucks. When I die, which should be in the next six minutes to avoid paying taxes, I would hope to go in the most non-video-game manner possible. Please, grayed image of Emmanuel Lewis that I routinely bow down to, don't flash the screen red with my blood as if my lunch consisted of two buckets of AB-negative that I subsequently regurgitated repeatedly and with gusto. Also, please don't think it's a good idea to gray the screen so it appears as if my final act is viewing the 1912 World's Fair through grandma's stereoscope.

Videogames love death. They gleefully embrace dying with all it entails in the real world: restarts, hucked controllers, foul language to make a sailor blush, and also threats to burn down the ancestral home (Cincinnati, OH) of former U.S. President William Howard Taft. And, of course, to accurately portray the act, game companies have capitulated to create the most awkward convention ever—and this embraces all definitions of “convention” to include gatherings of Trekkies and anime fans.

It's easy to swallow most game conventions. Treasure and clues shine and blink to be found more easily. A ham shank will cure 37 stab wounds. The head is always the weak point: shoot it and not, say, the duodenum.

When it comes to a player-controlled character dying, all bets are off. Graying the screen or flashing it red (complete with serpentine veins) ranks right up there with the cliché of the haphazardly placed explosive barrel. It makes no sense, and is just there because no one can come up with something better.

Dead to Rights: Retribution turns the gameplay screen gray when cop Jack Slate's taken one too many bullets to the head. *He's grayed out!* Dying! But the game shows Slate in the third-person perspective. The world isn't being viewed from his eyes, but rather camera-viewing Slate, what's in front of him, and a good portion of stuff behind him. Is the camera dying? The world? If so, I heartily advise panicking.

In *BioShock 2*, the screen turns bright red when a player nears death. This, too, reeks of someone's questionable design. It makes more sense

to show some effect of near-death in the first-person perspective, but certainly not enough. The player is looking through a Big Daddy's visor that, one supposes, becomes caked with blood stains when its wearer is about to pass on. Yet the stains recede when a first-aid kit is employed, prompting the question: Where did the blood go? And why do the stains extend beyond the borders of Dad's helmet? Is this some kind of magic blood?

Suspension of disbelief can address these technical concerns. I can swallow the convention in that respect, to be sure. It's harder to choke down the notion that just about every game company has chosen to embrace this screen-altering technique simply because it's the most intrusive and obnoxious way to highlight death, save for perhaps huge block letters on the game screen stating “YOU ARE CLOSE TO DEATH. EAT A HAM SHANK YOU MORON.”

Go ahead and slow the game world. Make its edges go fuzzy. Distort the music. Tune out sound altogether and allow for the humming of cherubs. Do anything but smear the screen red, or turn the world a hideous gray. It's a revolting way to go.

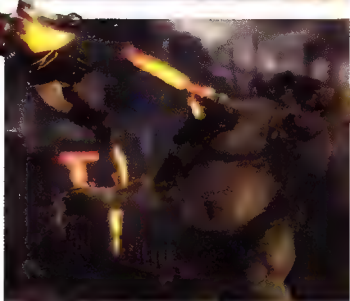


It's hard to keep a good god-killer down. Sony plans to bring the psychotic Kratos back for a whopper of an encore on PSP: *God of War: Ghost of Sparta*.

Sparta serves as a bridge between *God of War* and its sequels. The story revolves around Kratos dealing with his newfound godhood as he struggles to prove his worth to his new supernatural associates. Sony promises this adventure will answer lingering questions about Kratos' tattoo, scar, and family.

Not much else is known about the game at this juncture, but developer Ready at Dawn Studios hints *Sparta* will dramatically improve on *God of War: Chains of Olympus* (PTOM's 2008 PSP Game of the Year), which marked the series' debut on Sony's handheld console. Among the bigger and better bullet-points are 25 percent more gameplay than *Olympus*, more on-screen enemies, and monsters that are three times the size of their predecessors.

The ghost will be given up later this year. Which is entirely not soon enough for *God of War* fans.



↑ Players can furnish their houses with all sorts of furniture and decorations. The Comfort 820 Self-Immolating couch is, surprisingly, a very poor seller.

9 Life, Simulated

Back to life, back to digital reality with *Sims 3*

Electronic Arts plans to finally bring its little computer people adventure to PlayStation 3 with *The Sims 3*. Players can create their own simulated people and have all sorts of work/bathroom/pool party/fiery couch/ghost laden adventures that are somehow more compelling than their corresponding real-world actions. Go figure.



↑ The ladies love a man with a pool, even if he's a complete tool like Johnny Toolbox here.





10 Does Stealth mode empower players?

We have a sneaking suspicion we're in for a fight



YES

Says the
supersly

Don't Butt out!

Stealth mode is a game mechanic that allows players to avoid detection by enemies. It is often used in action games to provide a more challenging experience. In this article, we will explore the benefits of stealth mode and how it can empower players. We will discuss the different types of stealth mechanics and how they can be used to create a more immersive and rewarding gaming experience. We will also look at some of the most popular stealth games and how they have shaped the genre. Finally, we will provide some tips and tricks for mastering stealth mode in various games.

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NO

Opines the openly
argumentative

That's the way

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What's on your radar for 2010?



NICK WILLIAMS | OTX DIRECTOR, GAMING INSIGHTS

OTX's GamePlan weekly tracking study surveys 1,000 U.S. gamers and game buyers including hardcore gamers, casual gamers and everyone in between. The study tracks up to 600 game SKUs at any given time, including all major console, handheld, PC, and iPhone titles.

Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo 5* remains at the top of the list of most anticipated PS3 titles releasing after July 1, 2010. The announcement of 3D support for the highly anticipated racing sequel already seems to have generated a spike in purchase intent among PS3 gamers, and we expect this to increase over the coming months.

No surprises at number two on the charts, with the perennial NFL juggernaut closing in on another successful launch. *Madden NFL 11* has been gaining a lot of momentum in the last few weeks, with the pre-order intent among those who plan to buy the PS3 version climbing to more than 30%. In other words, nearly one out of every three sales for the PS3 version of *Madden NFL 11* will be generated by pre-orders.

Batman Arkham Asylum 2 takes the number three spot on the charts, and looks poised to improve upon the breakout success of the original. Thanks to the exclusive PS3 content featured in the original, the sequel continues the trend of strong purchase intent among PS3 owners.

SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs, ranked 4th, is emerging as another potential hardware driver for SCEA. The latest data shows that 34% of those who plan to purchase *SOCOM 4* do not yet own a PS3. In combination with the launch of *Gran Turismo 5* and *PlayStation Move*, it's shaping up to be a captivating holiday season for the PS3.

For more information, visit
www.GamePlanInsights.com

TOP 10 PS3 GAMES*

1. **Gran Turismo 5**
Sony Computer Entertainment
2. **Madden NFL 11**
Electronic Arts
3. **Batman Arkham Asylum 2**
Square Enix
4. **SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs**
Sony Computer Entertainment
5. **Metal Gear Rising (2010)**
Electronic Arts
6. **Rock Band 3**
MTV Games
7. **Twisted Metal**
Sony Computer Entertainment
8. **NCAA Football 11**
Electronic Arts
9. **The Sims 3**
Electronic Arts
10. **Guitar Hero 6**
Activision

Data Date Range: March 21, 2010 to April 25, 2010 (sample size ~ 4,000)

All OTX metrics are indexed against titles releasing on/after July 1, 2010.

*Top titles based on purchase intent collected via OTX's weekly tracking study of 1,000 gamers in the US.



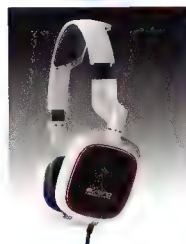


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Blu-ray Central



James Cameron's *Avatar*

PRICE: \$35.99 RATED: PG-13

The first release of James Cameron's mega-success is, if nothing else, a perfect opportunity to truly appreciate the dichotomy of his beloved sci-fi epic. On the surface, this 2D-only Blu-ray is truly stunning. *Avatar* is absolutely a demonstration-quality disc to get your friends and family to just after a proper Blu-ray setup of their own. The picture is amazing, with a spectacular level of detail. The soundtrack is pumped up and easily up to the task of matching the visuals. But while the sheer majesty of the film's colorful, dreamy visuals and cutting-edge technology were so enthralling on the big screen, the movie is shrunk down to its basics at home.

Get past all the shiny effects, gorgeous CG characters, and intense battles and we're ultimately left with a hollow movie that puts technology so far above storytelling that we can't help but wonder what happened to the James Cameron we used to love. *Avatar* is full of one-dimensional characters, black-and-white morality, and an ending that seems naive at best. The company man is a spineless narcissist, the gruff military guy just wants to shoot stuff, the clueless lead and the plot are by-the-numbers. It's *Dances with Wolves* without the substance to justify the slow pacing and irksome length.

Frankly, all these flaws still wouldn't have diminished the movie had Fox not released such an insultingly sparse home version. There are no extras here whatsoever—nothing. What's more, there are at least two more versions coming by the end of the year. Even if you adore the movie—and there's still a lot to love in *Avatar*—we can't recommend this release for anything but a rental.



Sherlock Holmes

PRICE: \$35.99 RATED: R

✚ Dammit, Guy Ritchie is finally back. *Sherlock Holmes* is an incredibly fun and entertaining, almost comic-bookish action flick, and a shining beacon of hope for the director's post-Madonna years. The movie extends Ritchie's range while honing his skills for deftly mixing sly humor and gritty violence. Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law have nearly perfect bromance chemistry, and the whole extravagant affair looks and sounds phenomenal on Blu-ray. Ritchie also hosts Warner's excellent "maximum movie mode" feature and guides you through the making of the film while watching it.



Red Cliff

PRICE: \$29.98 RATED: R

✚ John Woo's name isn't synonymous with epic war films, but this lush and stylish look at a historic Chinese battle is the work of a master. The story of a clandestine group of generals trying to out-fox the emperor's deceitful prime minister and his massive force is intense and beautifully shot. Fans of the *Dynasty Warriors* games will love how the nearly superhuman generals single-handedly dominate foes. That said, there are two film versions—the two-plus hour U.S. and the nearly five hour international release. We recommend the longer version over the edited U.S. release.



Fantastic Mr. Fox

PRICE: \$39.99 RATED: PG

+ Like Spike Jonze's *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is really a movie for adults that kids can grow into. The only complaint with this otherwise wondrous release is the lack of extras. A decent making-of documentary and some throwaway promo videos simply don't do justice to Wes Anderson's thoroughly creative take on the classic children's tale. The amazingly insightful layers of relationships, perfect dialogue, and truly quirky animation make this *Fox* not just fantastic, but one of the most original cinematic treats in years. Don't pass it by.



Armored

PRICE: \$29.95 RATED: PG-13

+ By all rights, *Armored* should really suck. It's directed by some guy we never heard of (named Nimrod of all things, who incidentally, is also the guy behind this month's *Predators*), with a ludicrous plot about one guy trying to stop his coworkers from stealing a bunch of money out of their own armored trucks. Instead, the movie sucked us into its trainwreck of a heist and made for a fun evening of mindless entertainment. Also, the movie keeps ubiquitous but underappreciated Fred Ward (*Roma Williams*) working, which is always a plus. Sadly, the commentary track is awful, and the rest of the extras aren't worth writing home about either.



The Men Who Stare at Goats

PRICE: \$39.99 RATED: R

+ With its stellar cast of Clooney, McGregor, Bridges, and Spacey, a bizarre story based on actual events, and offbeat hilarious humor, it's easy to assume *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is straight Coen Brothers' madness. It's not, but comes damn close. Hilarious and probably hated by the armed forces, the movie is part political statement and part comedic buddy-adventure flick. It's smart, with great characters and dialogue, and the inclusion of exceptionally interesting commentary tracks from both the director and the source material's journalist author make it a topnotch pick.



The Lord of the Rings: Original Animated Classic

PRICE: \$29.99 RATED: PG

- You'll be forgiven if you've never heard of the animated *Lord of the Rings*. There's a reason it passed into obscurity hours after it came out in the late '70s. Packing half the trilogy into just over two hours hobbled the classic adventure into a hopeless mess—complete with an ending that just, well, ends, and promises a sequel that was never made. It's just as well as the animated "classic" is utterly devoid of the characterizations and tension that made the books and Peter Jackson's films so astounding. Consider it a forgettable curiosity even for diehard fans of the series.



The Natural

PRICE: \$24.95 RATED: PG

+ Sports movies have an incredible ability to stir an audience's emotions, and few have done so wistfully perfect a job as *The Natural*. With a now classic home-run victory sequence, frame-perfect score by Randy Newman, and a terrific Robert Redford-led cast, the film has aged gracefully and the Blu-ray transfer is terrific. The movie itself is a magical tale that takes all the traditional characters and plot points of epic myths and adopts them to America's favorite pastime. There's an excellent documentary about the movie and its historical elements as well, making it a worthy addition to any Blu-ray collection—baseball fan or not.



Wonderful World

PRICE: \$29.99 RATED: R

+ *Wonderful World* is a smart and moving movie about a painfully cynical and depressed former children's singer played pitch-perfect by Matthew Broderick. It's a great film, but might only appeal to other painfully cynical and depressed guys trying to cope with the rigors of the modern world. *Wonderful World*'s cast is small, the story intimate, and the characters are universally terrific. The movie might verge on the negative, but still manages to be a funny and upbeat tale that deserves more than minor indie-movie attention. Extras are light unfortunately, with just a few behind-the-scenes shorts.

Kiddie Time

It's never too early to teach your kids about the importance of high-definition



Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel

PRICE: \$39.95 RATED: PG

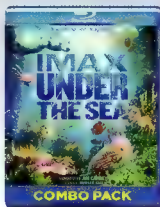
If you've got a child under 10, you've probably already probably already been forced to watch this fusion of squeaking rodents and high school drama. And now you get to watch it over and over again.



The Wizard of Oz

PRICE: \$28.99 RATED: NR

Warner Bros.'s amazing Blu-ray conversion is finally available at a much more reasonable price point for this standard edition. If the \$100 boxed set was too much, this one is just right.



IMAX Under the Sea

PRICE: \$35.95 RATED: G

Like having an aquarium on your TV, this disc sports some of the sharpest and most realistic high-def images we've ever seen. It's educational, yet strangely soothing.



Ponyo

PRICE: \$39.99 RATED: G

This enchantingly weird Japanese fairy tale is based on *The Little Mermaid*, but Studio Ghibli's *Ponyo* is about as far removed from Disney's version as you could get.

Previews

First Look | Hands-On | In-Depth



GUITAR HERO 6

A quest for the soul
of rock-and-roll

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Music
PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Neversoft



← Johnny Napalm's warrior version can teleport and climb walls. This won't help us beat *Through the Fire and the Flames*, but it does remind us of a certain X-Man.

It was a battle the likes of which mortal men could never hope to comprehend, an epic struggle between legendary figures that drew upon ancient and mysterious powers. Though their conflict spanned the ages, in the end, the wicked prevailed over the righteous, and the world was plunged into an all-consuming darkness, leaving the fate of mankind in the hands of those who would see reason and order restored, once more.

And yes, we are still talking about *Guitar Hero*.

According to *Guitar Hero 6* project

lead Brian Bright, the development team at Neversoft felt that in the process of building a more intuitive and fully featured experience in *Guitar Hero 5* and *Guitar Hero: World Tour*, the franchise lost much of the "soul" that made the earlier games so beloved. In response, they've set out to recapture some of that magic by crafting a larger-than-life, rock-'n'-roll-fueled fantasy. The result? The game's all new quest mode.

Bulwary

Quest mode is essentially a story driven campaign that can be tackled

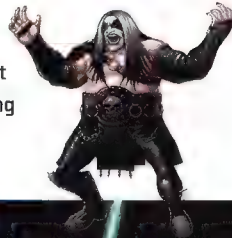
solo or by a full band—though like *Hero 5*, any arrangement of instruments will do. Following a fully rendered opening cinematic (which Bright promises will be "epic"), we begin our quest to liberate The Demigod of Rock—who was banished to a granite tomb after being defeated by The Beast—by rocking our way through the hand-picked song list and amassing an army of warriors in the process.

Each of the eight chapters focuses on a different iconic character from the *Guitar Hero* roster like Lars Ulrich or Johnny Napalm, all of

who will eventually become the aforementioned warriors...once they prove they're worthy of freeing The Demigod. In addition to focusing on a unique genre of music, each character possesses a different special ability. Lars, for example, is capable of achieving a 5x multiplier (as opposed to the usual 4x) while keeping a note streak alive, and Johnny can earn a couple extra stars by maintaining a 4x multiplier for a suitably lengthy period of time.

That's right, extra stars. Unlike previous *Guitar Hero* games—which granted a maximum of six stars for a

“ The development team at Neversoft have set out to recapture some of the *Guitar Hero* magic by crafting a larger-than-life, rock-'n'-roll-fueled fantasy. ”



Dropout
Main Menu

◆ Beginner
◆ Easy
◆ Medium
◆ Hard
◆ Expert

“ In keeping with the game's fantastic story, the venues are suitably over the top. ”

The Track List thus far!

AFI *Dancing Through Sunday*
BLACK SABBATH *Children of the Grave*
BUZZCOCKS *What Do I Get?*
CHILDREN OF BODOM *If You Want Peace... Prepare for War*
DEF LEPPARD *Pour Some Sugar On Me (Live)*
DETHKLOK *Bloodlines*
DRAGONFORCE *Fury of the Storm*
JANE'S ADDICTION *Been Caught Stealing*
KISS *Love Gun*
MEGADETH *Sudden Death*
METALLICA AND OZZY OSBOURNE *Paranoid (Live)*
MUSE *Uprising*
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)*
QUEEN *Bohemian Rhapsody*
RAMMSTEIN *Weidmänners Heil*
SILVERSUN PICKUPS *There's No Secrets This Year*
SLAYER *Chemical Warfare*
THE CURE *Fascination Street*
ZZ TOP *Sharp-Dressed Man (Live)*



7 A progress bar above the score now indicates how much of the song has elapsed.

note-perfect performance of a track—it's actually possible to accumulate dozens of stars in just one song thanks to the characters' powers. The more stars a band earns, the further it progresses through quest mode, unlocking new items, chapters, and songs along the way. Eventually, those stars will enable each character to transform into a fearsome warrior with a brutal new appearance and even stronger special abilities, which can be used to replay old songs for even more stars.

Once we amass a sufficient supply of stars, we enter into a final battle (presumably against The Beast) that features a special track written and preformed specifically for *Hero 6* by

Megadeth's Dave Mustaine. Seems like a fitting culmination for a rock-'n'-roll epic, right?

A New Challenger

Of course, quest mode might seem a bit too "out there" for some, so for those people, Neversoft has created Quickplay +. This revamped version of the classic mode follows a more traditional format but offers an unprecedented amount of depth. Every song in the game—including downloadable content and tracks imported from previous games—contains 12 different challenges, from achieving note streaks of a particular length to nailing a certain number of chords.

With more than 90 songs on the disc, and hundreds more available as DLC, that's a lot of challenges.

These challenges incorporate all four instruments, allow for three levels of completion, and most importantly, let us compete with our friends. Though the challenges are ambient (meaning we can beat any challenge any time we play a song), we can actually target specific challenges and share our results with the touch of a button. So if our buddy stands above us on a particular challenge leaderboard, we can instantly notify him when we crush his high score.

But that's just the beginning of Quickplay +'s new competitive

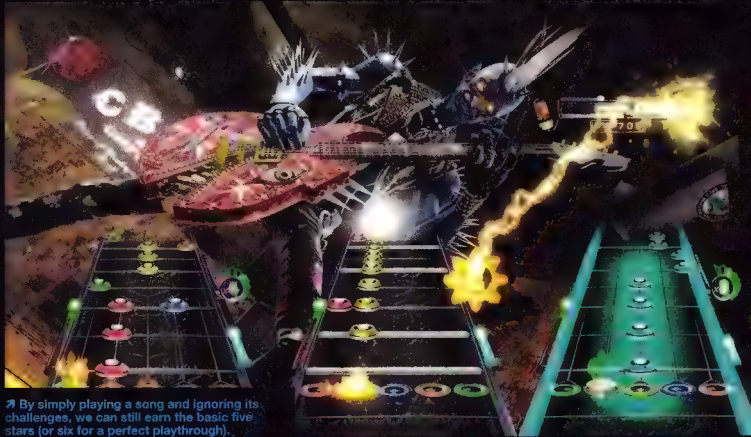
features. In the process of playing a song or beating a challenge, we earn stars (which, somewhat confusingly, are completely separate from the stars you collect in quest mode) that contribute to our multiplayer rank. Think of it like leveling up in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*: the more challenges we complete, the more stars we earn. The more stars we earn, the higher our rank.

And then there are power challenges. In addition to the 12 regular challenges, every song can also be played using combinations of any two special abilities from quest mode. Naturally, this generates an embarrassment of additional stars further boosting our multiplayer rank. Seriously, this game is absolutely bursting with stars. It's practically its own galaxy at this point.

Classic Rock

Despite all of these additions, *Hero 6* should still feel familiar to longtime fans. The basic gameplay remains entirely unchanged: Notes scroll down the screen in time with a song; we hammer the corresponding notes on our plastic axes. Simple. And all of the party-friendly features of *Hero 5* return, including party play, which allows us to press a single button at the start screen and immediately commence rocking.

Unfortunately, certain other aspects of the gameplay—like the visuals—look unchanged as well, but just knowing that KISS' Gene Simmons will narrate our journey into rock-'n'-roll's heart of darkness is enough to keep us intrigued. | Scott Butterworth



7 By simply playing a song and ignoring its challenges, we can still earn the basic five stars (or six for a perfect playthrough).

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METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

Peace is merely a preparation for war

PSP AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions

Sixteen hours into *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*, it feels like we've barely scratched the surface. We've raised an army (mainly from the subdued and kidnapped ranks of the enemy) and used them to populate a growing network of offshore platforms that's come to be known as Outer Heaven. We've forged an alliance with Sandinista guerrillas, developed powerful new weapons in our research and development lab, and shot or fought hand-to-hand through more alerts than we can remember. And we've fought alongside other players through countless, lengthy story missions, which have thrown us against everything from soldiers and tanks to gargantuan robot death machines that sing in women's voices.

But we haven't caught more than a few glimpses of the game's namesake: the massive, artificial-

intelligence-controlled mech known as Peace Walker. And to be honest, we're still not sure what the heck is going on.

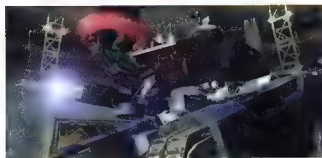
A Resumption of Hostilities

Set in 1974, 10 years after the events of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, and four years after *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*, *Walker* opens with Naked Snake/Big Boss at the head of his own fledgling mercenary group, Militaires Sans Frontiers (soldiers without borders). Before long, he's visited by a mysterious man and a teenage refugee who want his help in stopping the CIA from smuggling nukes into Costa Rica. They also bring something more: evidence his old mentor/enemy, The Boss, may still be alive.

From there, it's a whole lot of the sneaking, tranquilizing, choking, and shooting through hostile jungles, towns, and military bases—the stuff

that's defined the series. The sound radar from *Ops* is back, as is *Eater*'s camouflage system, which—as we unlock more and better camo patterns—enables us to hide in plain sight. But while there's a lot that'll be familiar to *Metal Gear* fans, there's even more that's new, starting with this doozy: *Peace Walker*, from a raw gameplay perspective, is essentially *Monster Hunter*.

As with Capcom's *Monster Hunter*, *Peace Walker* is divided into straightforward missions spread across an interconnected series of small, enemy-filled environments that should be explored with at least one other player. It's also defined by boss battles against huge, seemingly unfair foes (i.e. tanks and giant robot gunships). These aren't impossible to beat alone, but are much easier to take down when we have someone along to revive fallen characters or



↑ Unfriendly Ops

While *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* puts an emphasis on cooperative play, making nicey-nice with other players isn't a requirement. Versus ops is perfect for anti-social competitive types, enabling them to test their best gadgets, weapons, and troops against up to five other players in deathmatches, team deathmatches, capture-the-flag, and voice-control matches.



✦ If timed right, Snake's CQC can now knock out multiple enemies at once.



call in airstrikes on the beasts. The good news is that if the vehicles are disabled rather than destroyed, we get to keep them.

Playing Politics

At the same time, this is still very much *Metal Gear*. The traditional action and goofiness are present, as is the hero's ability to hide in

cardboard boxes (now built for two). More importantly, *Peace Walker* puts an emphasis on story and character development, once again treating us to fascinating-but-overlong cutscenes that frequently dip into treatises on nuclear deterrence and Cold War politics. As In Ops, these sequences are animated in the style of a graphic novel, although a lot

of them are actually interactive this time around, enabling us to aim weapons, uncover secrets, or blast through quick-time events.

Even though it's on PSP, *Peace Walker* is going to be huge. And if the rest of the game is as involving as what we played, *Metal Gear* fans might want to clear their calendars for its June 8 release. | Mikel Reparaz



✦ Two-man boxes are fun, but not as fun as the ones shaped like tanks.



Home to Mother

One of the central features of *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* is the Mother Base (aka Outer Heaven), which the protagonist returns to between missions. It's here captured soldiers can be assigned jobs based on their skills. Meatheads belong in a combat unit, where they boost GMP (available cash) and become available for the non-story extra ops and non-interactive, turn-based outer ops missions. Meanwhile, adding techs to the research division helps develop and upgrade new weapons and technologies more quickly. Wreath the mess hall well-stocked, cybernauts will help heal injured soldiers faster, and good intel officers can locate new items and mission opportunities. Best of all, players can eventually build a *Metal Gear* of their very own.

F.3.A.R.

We have nothing to fear but game names with letter-supplanting numbers

PS3 AVAILABLE: October **GENRE:** Shooter
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. **DEV:** Etn **DEVELOPER:** Day 1 Studios



Say hello to mom. She's pregnant and her contractions open demonic rifts. Join the fight against her as a super-soldier who's killed his psychic brother, but teams up with him anyway.

Welcome to the messed-up world of *F.3.A.R.*

Think of *FEAR*, as an ultraviolent episode of *The X-Files* with a lot more slow-motion bullet time. *FEAR*'s protagonist was Pointman, a member of the First Encounter Assault Recon government team tasked with paranormal activity investigations. Pointman had a few things on his agenda: trying to make sense of Alma, a little girl who kept appearing to him in creepy visions; murdering his brother, Fettel, which turned out to be a roaring success; and killing his mother, Alma. Sadly, he failed to take out the old lady, resulting in a blast that wiped out the city.

F.3.A.R. 2: Project Origin starred Beckett, a soldier called in to clean up the mess. Things didn't go smoothly: Alma returned, generated a psychic link, and used him to impregnate herself during the end game.

So where can developer Day 1 Studios take us next? It's placing players back in the

shoes of Pointman and his dead brother, Fettel. *F.3.A.R.* offers a campaign playable in cooperative mode, or as a more traditional single-player shooter. Of course, Alma's back too, only this time she's pregnant with something horrible, the thing Beckett "helped" create at the end of the second game.

FEAR with a Friend

The details aren't clear, but we're told Pointman has chosen to return to the blast zone he created in *FEAR*. Fettel's agenda is also unclear, but he's rejoined Pointman in ghost form and acquired a physical body thanks to the psychic link between them. "We wanted to create a scary that

really complemented the cooperative aspect," the game's creative director, Frank Rooke says. "This isn't just run of the mill co-op. We're calling it divergent co-op."

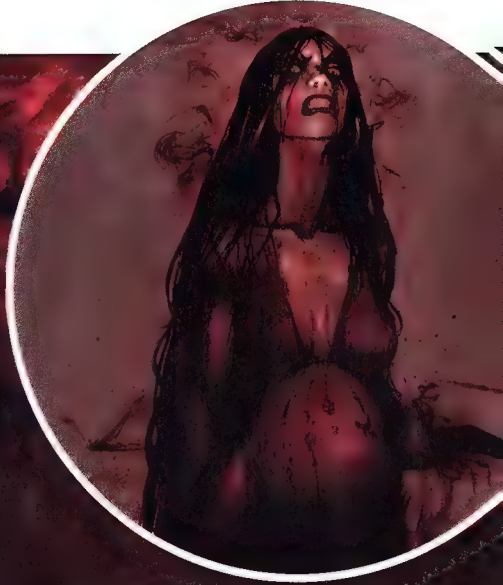
Considering fans of the series are more used to single-player experiences hinged on paranormal horror and close-quarter gunplay, a two-player adventure might seem an odd choice. After all, it's a lot harder to generate scares when players are chatting over PSN, or sitting next to each other (*F.3.A.R.* will support splitscreen play too). Dan Hay, the game's executive producer, says steps are being taken to keep things tense: "Both players have their own experience of what's going on—our generative scare system is a part of that. It offers up different kinds of events in a random way, so you'll get a different type of horror experience when you play different parts. It dictates how many, and where enemies enter a space."


The sibling rivalry is obvious from the start—the bullet hole in Fettel's head is a powerful reminder of his brother's love, it's a dynamic altering the gameplay itself, these are more than a pair of identical characters placed on a linear path. Through the lens of the demo, Hay says, "Fettel can do things that the other player can't. He can discover places,"

stash, and alternate routes, but hasn't got to share the information, it's competitive and co-operative. We see a section where Fettel uncovers a train carriage holding a shotgun. Though the weapon's only wieldable by Pointman, Fettel can choose not to share the information. Why a player would choose to lie to their co-op partner is not completely clear.

It's not just about level design. The characters' personalities affect the gunplay, too. Pointman's interface and abilities will be obvious to anyone who's played the first *FEAR*; his meaty weaponry and slow-motion reflex time can be used to devastate enemies with a wash of satisfying particle effects. Fettel uses supernatural powers to complement his brother's brute force, stunning and suspending enemies as Pointman empties clips into their defenseless bodies.

Toward the end of our demo both brothers enter elite power armor (huge mechs) and travel down alternate routes on a bridge, taking down helicopters and ripping up the landscape before going head-to-head with rival forces. Eventually the two brothers become overwhelmed and are catapulted from the bridge into the water below. It's a frightful way to end a game demonstration, but it's also a game that's already got a lot of creeped-out fans.





← Pointman and shoot

A former U.S. Special Forces soldier, Pointman is blessed with superhuman reflexes. He's been mute in the first two *F.E.A.R.* games, but is haunted by visions of his now-pregnant freak-show mom and his deceased brother.

→ Fine Fettel?

Fettel absorbs victims' memories by consuming their bodies. He led an army of replica soldiers (cloned superwarriors) to rescue mom in *F.E.A.R.*, but is thwarted by a bullet in his head, put there by his beloved brother.



CRYSIS 2

So pretty it'll make you cry

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Crytek

Can it run *Crysis*? That single question became an Internet meme in 2008 when Crytek took the PC gaming world by storm with the original *Crysis*, a first-person shooter with eye-popping visuals so groundbreaking that it became a standard by which all PC rigs were judged.

Now the Frankfurt, Germany-based developer is firing a direct salvo at the console market with *Crysis 2*, a serious contender for the best-looking PS3 game of 2010.

Island Hopping

Set in the year 2020, the action of *Crysis* followed U.S. Delta Forces operative Jake Dunn—codenamed Nomad—as he donned the super-powered Nanosuit to battle aliens and North Koreans on a Philippine

island. *Crysis* adopted an interesting approach, mixing first-person shooting with elements of sandbox gaming, which allowed players to work their way through pockets of enemies in varied sequences for an open-ended experience.

Crysis 2 takes place three years later with some notable differences. Crytek CEO and co-founder Cevat Yerli says feedback from gamers and peers was overwhelmingly positive regarding *Crysis*' visuals and gameplay, but the game lost marks for its predictable story. So acclaimed sci-fi author Richard Morgan was called in.

The Arthur C. Clarke Award-winner was hired to flesh out the *Crysis* universe and its mythology, providing the sequel with narrative twists and turns to keep gamers intrigued while introducing a greater level of emotional

depth. One of the key factors of this greater connective investment: changing the game's locale from a tropical island to an urban jungle—Manhattan.

Start Spreading the News

Three years after the events of *Crysis*, Manhattan is a shattered remnant of its former glory, populated with the burnt out husks of once-gleaming skyscrapers. A trailer for *Crysis 2* flashes with imagery reminiscent

of 9/11—a sky littered with fluttering debris and photos of missing persons posted on a wall. Only in this game-world, the devastation has been caused by alien invaders hell-bent on the extermination of mankind.

According to producer Nathan Camarillo, *Crysis 2*'s action will take gamers across Manhattan and its many famous landmarks, and while he stopped short of confirming any, the game's concept art included post-apocalyptic visions of Madison





Square Garden, the Statue of Liberty, Grand Central Terminal, and Roosevelt Island.

The trailer offered a glimpse of the Flatiron Building, but the two scenarios Crytek revealed to us were set

▼ This is what happens when the New York Knicks win a game.



“The storyline revolves around the Nanosuit 2.0—it becomes a character in its own right, with its own mystery, destiny, and endpoint.”

in the Wall Street area, with the player battling tentacled aliens and human mercenaries alike using weapons that included heavy machine gun, shotgun, sniper rifle, grenade launcher, and pistol. But the most impressive piece of equipment is the Nanosuit 2.0, a next-gen warsuit covered in muscle-like striations designed to allow its wearer to “Adapt, Engage, Survive,” according to its manufacturer.

The Suit Makes the Man

Morgan pointed out that a large part of the storyline revolves around the Nanosuit 2.0—so much so that “it becomes a character in its own

right,” he says, “with its own mystery, destiny, and an endpoint that becomes intertwined with the city’s and the player’s.”

Yerli explained *Crysis 2* was built on three fundamental elements: destructibility of the environments, the catastrophic beauty of its New York City, and the Nanosuit 2.0, which allows the gamer to play in two ways: either hunting or destroying—or, as Yerli says, becoming “a predator, or a tank.”

To that end, players will be given the option to improve the Nanosuit in four areas as the game unfolds. The two primary characteristics are armor



and stealth—these allow the player to withstand more damage or become cloaked to enemies. These qualities are easily switchable, so that the player can flip from heavily armored to invisible in a single jump. The Nanosuit also features a tactical layer, with binoculars and data scanner, as well as a power layer improving the suit’s mobility and speed.

While we’ve yet to learn about specific story details or even multiplayer modes, Camanillo promises that *Crysis 2* will deliver “the best-looking, best-playing, most compelling, greatest experience you can have on PlayStation 3.” | Dan DiGiacomo

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Kane & Lynch 2 focuses on the psychotic Lynch, whose only redeeming trait is that he doesn't sport a comb-over.

Don't forget to pack extra bullets

PS3 AVAILABLE: August GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: IO Interactive

Iur first hands-on visit with *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days* took place as they chowed down on Chinese food in a Shanghai restaurant (apparently, it's simply called "food" there). The calming culinary respite lasted all of five seconds before being rudely interrupted by Chinese police authorities heavily armed with special weapons and tactics. We had our would-be criminal heroes respond in kind—albeit with more of an emphasis on weapons than tactics—and any hopes of a peaceful resolution to the unfortunate misunderstanding were lost.

After duly riddling the dining establishment—and the law enforcement officials foolish enough to take cover behind its destructible wooden furnishings—with bullets, Kane and Lynch exited without settling the tab or leaving a gratuity that might cover the damages incurred. It's out on the narrow streets of Shanghai the game's unique video-cam visual style becomes apparent. The unsteady handheld view, the flat under-saturated look inherent to video, and pixel artifacts that appear in conjunction with nearby blasts (and conveniently, during particularly graphic displays of violence or nudity) all combine to lend a sense of realism and immediacy to the intense action.

Progression through the restaurant's surrounding neighborhood recalled the classic shootout sequence from the film *Heat* as property, vehicles, responding police units, and innocent bystanders were dispatched with lethal efficiency. The haze of battle prevented us from noting any consequence for dispatching civilians, but it's doubtful this duo would be affected with guilty consciences. Judicious use of cover is far more important, as running and gunning will never lead to success or survival in this shooter. When enemy fire took down one of our criminal blasterminds, death was momentarily staved as we were afforded the opportunity to continue firing from the ground or crawl to safety.

Despite the auspices of a starting-over-in-Shanghai storyline, it's clear that action is the emphasis in *Dog Days*. There's really no way of warming up to a psychopath whose "redemption" lies in settling down with a girlfriend and starting his own criminal enterprise, or an ex-mercenary running away from family problems—but we can admire their teamwork and the ruthless way they dispatch any and all targets that happen across their gun sights. Yep, it makes us all tingly just thinking about it. | Roger Burchill



Perusing the retail shelves between bursts of gunfire, we noticed copies of *Hitman* and *Mini Ninjas*. They're probably counterfeit, of course.

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CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF

Whip it good...

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD 2010

GENRE: Action Adventure

PUBLISHER: Konami

DEVELOPER: MercurySteam/Kojima Productions

Don't call it a comeback. Okay, call it a comeback. Or call it a reboot: David Cox, producer for *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*, seems more than comfortable with either term. "Castlevania hasn't been enjoying the popularity it did back in the '80s and '90s," he says. "It's kind of been a series on the wane—a series that hasn't been relevant. What we're trying to do is make it relevant again. The only way, really, to do that was reboot the series."

With *Shadow*, Konami and Cox are forging into new territory. *Castlevania* has been around for more than two decades, and this is the first time the series has been entrusted to a Western developer. Further, the game is not connected to any of the other *Castlevania* titles save for its nods, winks, and homages.

"When you've got 25 years of storyline, of characters, of history, trying to get someone new into that is very, very difficult," Cox says. "We couldn't keep doing what we were doing before because it just wasn't commercially viable. We had to do something different with it. We had to do something new."



SHADOW

Casting Shadows

Shadow introduces Gabriel Belmont, wielder of the combat cross, and member of the Brotherhood of Light, an organization dedicated to smiting evil. As it often happens with game heroes, Belmont will be tasked with collecting artifact pieces, each of which is being held by an evil figure—in this case the titular Lords of Shadow.

Classic *Castlevania* elements are immediately evident: enormously coiled vampires, fearsome werewolves, a Belmont tearing through evil with a whip-like weapon and, of course, the huge Gothic-style castles. Players should also feel comfortable with the game's division of labor: Cox suggests it's all split roughly into thirds among platforming, combat, and puzzle solving. "What we tried to do is to have the player do five minutes of combat, five minutes of platforming, five minutes of puzzles, five minutes of story/exposition so there's always something different for the player to do all the time."

The new elements could triple: Madison Square Garden, it seems. Belmont will be pitted against huge, fearsome behemoths resembling the golems from Jewish mythology. Here, *Castlevania* eschews the

Belmont can access light or dark magic, and fuel these supernatural powers by crushing enemies and collecting orbs.

Lords of Shadow for the *Lords of Creative Borrowing*, as these titans are more than suggestive of the oversized foes in *Shadow of the Colossus* and the *God of War* series. "Players have to physically climb onto and navigate these monstrosities, using all of their platforming skills," Cox says. "Using only your combat cross and your wits, you'll need to hold on for dear life, or swing to a safer place. Each titan has magical runes that animate them and it's these that you need to find and destroy—but these massive enemies aren't going to make it easy."

In the Crosshairs

It's feeding time in the castle. Cox, playing an early build of the game, takes Belmont up against an evil butcher and his ghoul minions. The section highlights a bit of the game's puzzle elements—after whipping and impaling a small horde of ghouls, Belmont must summon the butcher in order to kill him and retrieve a key. It's necessary to collect a huge hunk of meat, place it optimally, and ring the dinner bell. It's a bit like the experiments Ivan Pavlov conducted with his drooling dogs, but with far, far more sprays of blood and viscera.

This is all made possible by the combat cross, a handy tool that slices, dices, and can be used for platforming and puzzle manipulation as well. At times, Belmont can use the cross as a whip, swinging across chasms like Indiana Jones. It can also be employed as a rappelling line and a lever to manipulate a crank.

Belmont can access light or dark magic, and fuel these supernatural powers by crushing enemies and collecting orbs. These orbs, then, can be assigned by the player to either the restorative or destructive magics. Successfully destroying foes while avoiding being hit fuels a focus bar that ramps up the production of orbs; in this way, it's possible to keep Belmont's magic fully powered through fights. Our hero can also utilize upgradeable subweapons such as daggers and holy water, and these are activated via the controller's D-pad.

Everything old may well be new again with *Shadow*. It remains to be seen if Konami and Cox can pull off their stated goals of restoring relevance to the franchise and bringing new fans into the fold. One thing, however, is certain: If neither of these is accomplished, it won't be for lack of trying. | Greg Orlando



★ Scott

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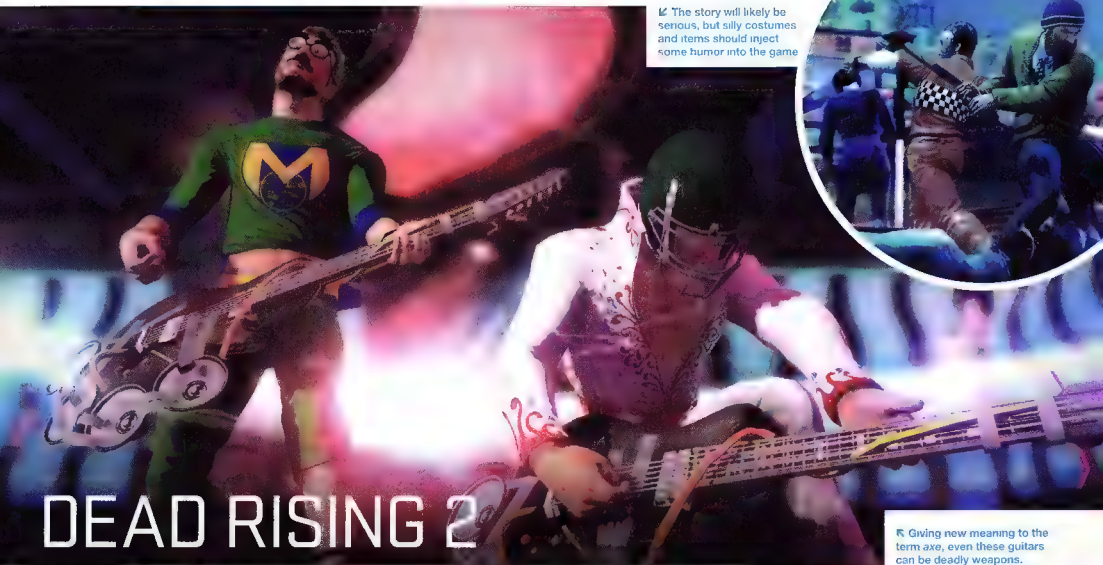
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✎ The story will likely be serious, but silly costumes and items should inject some humor into the game

✎ Giving new meaning to the term axe, even these guitars can be deadly weapons.

DEAD RISING 2

Now with double the Chuck!

PS3 AVAILABLE: August GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Blue Castle/Capcom

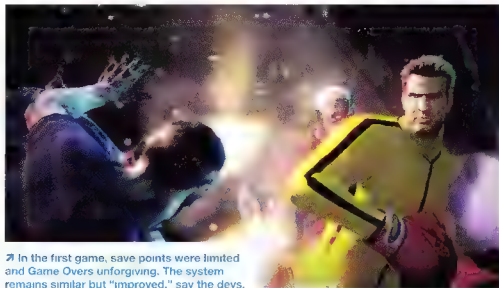
We all know the basics of *Dead Rising 2*, right? Scour large, open environments for sharp, heavy, or hilarious objects with which to eviscerate the endless zombie horde that's perpetually bearing down on unfortunate motocross racer Chuck Greene, and, if we're feeling a little creative, drag some of those items back to a workbench to maybe duct tape some machetes to a toy helicopter or rig up a flamethrower using a squirt gun and some gasoline. Whatever works.

Now Capcom's revealed that in addition to this assortment of makeshift weaponry, we'll also be able to bring along a buddy in *Dead Rising 2*. That's right, the campaign features full drop-in, drop-out co-op. While massacring the undead together, partners will share earned experience—increasing each player's health, inventory capacity, special abilities, and cash—which can be used to purchase items from looters' pawnshops. Naturally, anything we earn in a friend's game will transfer back to our own campaign.

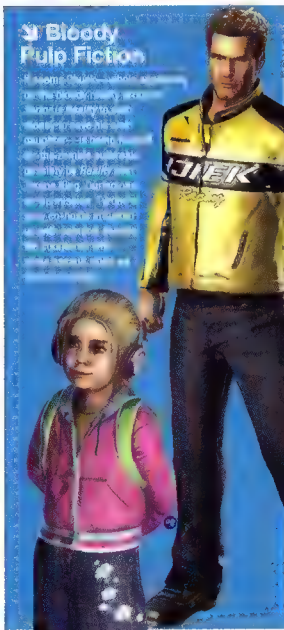
Players are also free to divide and conquer completely separate portions of the map, so long as they don't head somewhere that would trigger a load screen. This will come in especially handy considering the campaign's structure. As in the first *Dead Rising*, players will have just 72 accelerated game hours to escape their fate, during which they can choose to complete a number of optional timed, sometimes-overlapping objectives. Splitting up obviously means the team

will be able to save more survivors and battle more psychos than a player could single-handedly.

Our hands-on time with *Rising 2*'s co-op confirmed the advantages of teamwork: We helped each other locate valuable items, revived our teammate after zombie attacks, and discussed arming a shared militia of survivors but, sadly, couldn't locate any. Still, simply sharing the brilliantly brutal and hilarious experience with another person made everything feel more fun. After all, what's the point of mulching a zombie with a vacuum cleaner if no one's there to laugh at the spectacle? | Scott Butterworth



✎ In the first game, save points were limited and Game Overs unforgiving. The system remains similar but "improved," say the devs.



Special goo can be used to shrink in-game items.



You=Awesome!

"You're never more than 30-45 seconds away from a reward," Toy Story 3's producer Jonathan Warner says about the game's toy box mode. Warner says the developers wanted to make everything an event: new toys are delivered to players by stagecoach, and buildings are erected from the ground-up by an in-game construction team. In short, everything in the toy box is delivered with fanfare or, as Warner says, "Every day is your birthday!"

TOY STORY 3

The play's the thing

PS3 AVAILABLE: June GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Disney Int. Studios DEVELOPER: Avalanche

The developers at Avalanche pitched two ideas for the videogame adaptation of the animated film Toy Story 3. Disney Interactive loved both and, to senior producer Jonathan Warner's chagrin, told Avalanche to put them in the game.

"Why did we pitch two ideas?" Warner jokingly laments.

This means Story 3 will be of two minds on the singular subject of its play. The game offers a traditional adventure loosely following the plot of the Toy Story 3 animated movie, with eight levels, a board game navigation system, and play centering

around cowboy Woody, the clueless spaceman Buzz Lightyear, and the perky cowgirl Jesse as they perform such missions as a train-based rescue and assault on the villainous conqueror Zurg's fortress. Warner calls this a cool companion to what's clearly the main event.

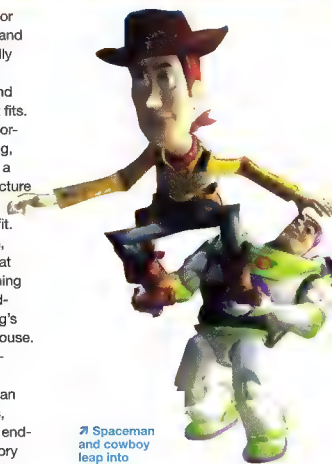
"Movie license games have a certain stigma to them. We want to change that," Warner says.

Avalanche's second idea was for toy box mode, a free-form mode wherein players are dropped into a Western-themed world right out of the fictional TV show Woody's Roundup. Players can opt to assume

the role of Woody, Buzz, Jesse, or the PlayStation-exclusive Zurg, and run amok in an orgy of delightfully unfettered play.

Game companies throw around "sandbox" far too freely. Here, it fits. Players can do as they will, exploring, building, wrecking, collecting, customizing, racing, and having a right goofy time. There's no structure to follow, and players can build their world in any way they see fit. Exploration, mission completion, and creative play earns coins that can then be used to buy everything from Bullseye the horse to world-expanding playsets such as Zurg's Spaceport and Sid's Haunted House.

A brief playtest hinted at wondrous, goofy fun complete with ghosts and banditos, goo that can alter the size of in-game objects, cow tossing, dragon races, and endless fun with TNT. This is one story that demands telling. | Greg Gurlando



Spaceman and cowboy leap into adventure.



Even the stalwart Buzz can be intimidated by a hulking, pink bear.



When you're away, your toys like to plot your grisly demise.



RAGE

Fight the Authority

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBA 2010
 GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Bethesda
 DEVELOPER: id Software

F or a company known for its technical prowess, id Software seems reluctant to talk too much about its latest engine, id Tech 5. Instead, with *Rage*, it's all about the gameplay.

This is the company that brought us to *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, and *Quake*, after all. When it comes to first-person shooters, "we invented the genre," creative director Tim Willits says. He's not kidding.

That's why the id team wants to stress that despite this being a new engine, it's not about pixels and megatextures. Instead, *Rage* is about diversity. "id Tech 5 allows us to build a hand-crafted, truly unique environment," Willits promises. "Gone are the days of space corridors that look like every other space corridor you've been in."

From what we saw in our recent demo, he's right. *Rage* is gorgeous—



Hint: If you don't want to get shot, don't paint a circle on your chest.

sort of like that achingly beautiful child spawned from two perfect parents. In this case, daddy is the post-apocalyptic *Fallout 3*, and mommy is the illustrative, stylistic *Borderlands*.

Death from Above

The apocalypse comes from the skies, as an asteroid hits Earth, destroying civilization. Emerging into the new world, we learn that more people survived than expected, and they're trying to rebuild society. But it's not all *kumbaya*; mutants and bandits roam the wasteland, and an omnipresent force called The Authority also looms

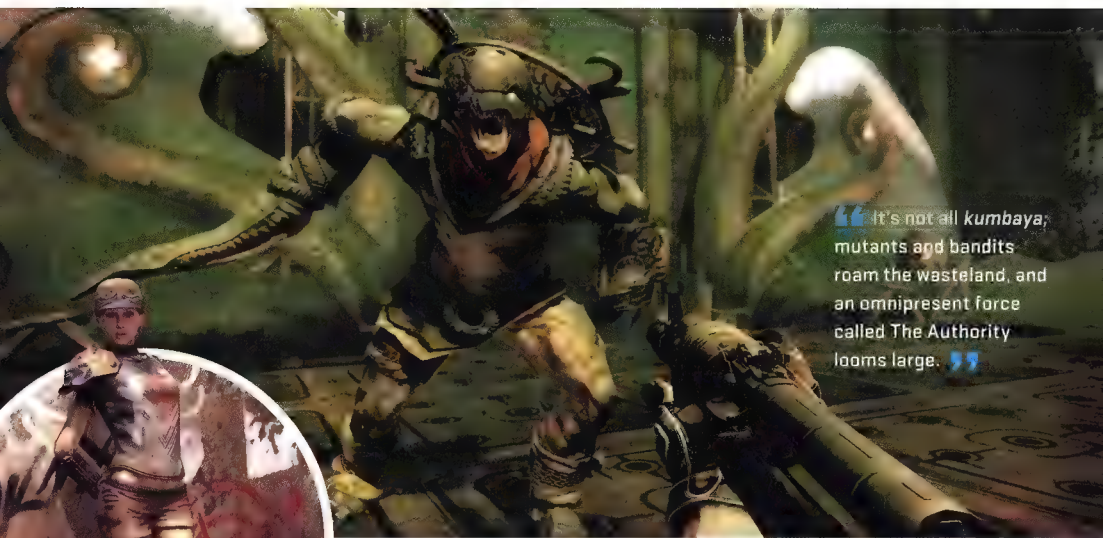
large in every corner of the world.

Despite the danger lurking everywhere, Willits wants to make sure we take our time to explore the world. "We've really tried to put something interesting under almost every rock." We could, if we like, spend as much time simply roaming the wastelands, earning cash for hunting bandits and stumbling across assorted side-missions. "We are an action shooter," creative director Matt Hooper says. "But at the same time we put these little nooks and crannies and all these little opportunities for the player."

That said, if we want to simply follow the storyline, it's easily done, without having to suffer through endless reams of dialogue or clicking on every non-playable-character out there. "Move around the world and the story takes care of itself," Hooper says.

But not a Drop to Drink

Choice is nice, but right now we need to head to Wellspring, the first major town in the game. A hub of trade, the town was built around a well that has become an essential source for clean water. Which is why bandits seem intent on poisoning



“It’s not all kumbaya; mutants and bandits roam the wasteland, and an omnipresent force called The Authority looms large.”

The Unrestrained id

We’ve yet to play it, but *Rage* is already showing an astounding amount of personality. We know that the shooter aspects will be there—this is id, after all—but we’re impressed by the color in the characters we’ve encountered, like Crazy Joe and Sally the Bartender. “When you’re talking to your friends about these characters, we want you to remember what he looks like, what his personality is, the way he talks, everything about him,” Hooper says.

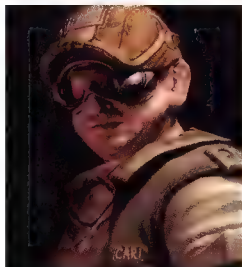
the well—because that’s what bandits do.

Our task: to stop the bandits. Before we head underground into the water purification system, we’re handed electro bolts. That brings us to another goal in *Rage*: to give players a constantly growing toy box, with a new addition for almost every mission that’s directly connected to the task at hand. In this case, we have bad guys who are standing in sewers. “Electricity, water—we think the player is going to get it,” Hooper smiles.

And get it, we do. Our hero shoots a bolt into a puddle, zapping three bandits at once. Others are alerted, and they clamor around the scaffolding with an acrobatic grace that’s stopped with a carefully placed shot to the head. (Or, at one point, with a nifty remote-controlled car bomb built based on plans and parts acquired throughout the game.) Their traversals are all dynamic, Hooper tells us. Nothing is scripted here, so every time we enter this area, it’ll play out differently. Better yet, no other group of bandits will act the same as this one.

We’re even looking forward to the vehicular aspects—oftentimes the weakest part of a shooter. Here, though, we’re told the buggies will control just like the on-foot action, only faster.

It’s this kind of focus on playability that has us most excited about *Rage*. Watching it being played in front of us, we had a tough time resisting the urge to grab the controller from our hosts. Because they’re right: This isn’t about the latest bit of tech—it’s about how it feels. We can’t wait to find out. | Gary Steinman



“This guy builds buggies when he’s not punching us in the face.”



PlayStation Gallery



Shank

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Brawler PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Clay Entertainment

It looks like an Adult Swim cartoon," Electronic Arts' product manager Alex Charlow says about the PSN game *Shank*. The game, which certainly does not skimp on either the blood or cel-shading, is being heralded by Charlow as a "cinematic brawler," the kind of game *Double Dragon* would have eventually evolved into.

The protagonist Shank stuffs grenades in his enemies' mouths. He'll use a giant chain to strangle an oversized butcher to death. He can use his shank to pin a foe to the ground while gunning down another sap. His chainsaw, rest assured, will not

be applied in a manner consistent with any safety regulator's guidelines. Each of Shank's weapons, Charlow says, is mapped to a gameplay button on the DualShock controller, and all have individual move sets.

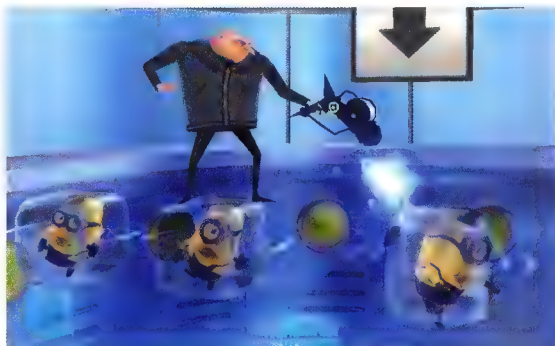
Platforming elements see the bandanna-wearing Shank leaping and climbing across a meat market, avoiding killer dogs and environmental perils. In perhaps one of the most creative scenes ever, he'll have to battle bathed entirely in silhouette, and this *Shank* seems sharp enough to warrant closer scrutiny. | Greg Orlando



Despicable Me

PS2, PSP AVAILABLE: July GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: D3 Publisher
DEVELOPER: Vicarious Cycle

The goofy supervillain Gru is unleashing his goggled minions on the PlayStation 2 and PSP. Gru (voiced by actor Steve Carell) serves as the protagonist of sorts in both the *Despicable Me* animated film and its videogame translations; *Despicable Me* the game blends elements of puzzle-solving, combat, and platforming for one silly adventure. Players as Gru can use their freeze ray (every good world-beater has one) to ice over platforms or switch over to an air gun to propel himself to great heights. As he quests to retrieve rocket pieces in a cockamamie plot to steal the moon, Gru will abuse his tiny minions, shooting them out of a gun and generally mistreating them to solve puzzles. D3 Publisher also promises flying stages and, for the PS2 iteration, two-player action. Despicable? Maybe. Delightful? Indeed. | Greg Orlando





DeathSpank

PSN AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Action RPG PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Hothead Games

The introductory text for the action role-playing game *DeathSpank* states this is a true story, by which it is meant that noted game designer Ron Gilbert made it up. Gilbert, for the uninitiated, was known for his work on such classic and very funny LucasArts adventures as *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*.

Electronic Arts' Alex Charlow throws out "*Monkey Island* meets *Diablo*" as the game's high concept, and it works. The titular *DeathSpank* is tasked with retrieving a mystical artifact, which is an absolutely fine excuse for him to run around and massacre everything in sight. On his journey, he'll get to talk to such interesting characters as a cow and "guy missing his wallet" and do plenty of smiting and puzzle-solving. A brief playtest reveals the game is full of whimsical slaughter and banter that shows off exactly how stupid a hero who interrogates a cow can be. | Greg Orlando



Test Drive Unlimited 2

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 GENRE: Driving PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Eden Studios

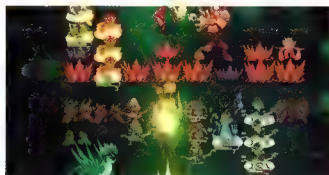
The first *Test Drive Unlimited* on PS2 was a flawed but ambitious open-world racer, but the sequel looks back on track. The original Hawaiian island setting makes way for Ibiza, the Mediterranean uber-club-packed heaven. Calling it a "Massively Open Online Racing" game, developer Eden Studios is attempting to seamlessly blend the online and offline worlds, *Burnout*-style. New features include changing weather, day-to-night cycles, new race types, new vehicle classes, and "environmental challenges." | James Coates



Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes

PSN AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Puzzle RPG PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Copybore

There was an age when the *Might & Magic* series was a shining force in computer role-playing games. That was before the dark times... And yet, the franchise lives on in this high-definition PlayStation Network version of a Nintendo DS game that's a prequel to Ubisoft's PC series reboot, *Heroes of Might & Magic V*. Got that? No? Suffice it to say with *Clash of Heroes*' distinctive manga-style visuals and its strategy-meets-puzzle-meets-role-playing gameplay, we're looking forward to exploring the world of Ashan and what could potentially be one of PSN's most involving offerings. | Roger Burchill




Feature

PS3 AVAILABLE: Now! | PUBLISHER: Ubisoft | DEVELOPER: Ubisoft

World Exclusive

Assassin's Creed

BROTHER



One-man army. It's a romantic notion, isn't it? The solitary soldier facing innumerable foes and impossible odds. But wars aren't won on the shoulders of an individual. Not when his enemies are powerful, entrenched, and insidious. And not when they're led by an adversary who is his equal in every way. **By Steve Tilley**

RHODD

Remember the young Ezio who snuck out his paramour's bedroom window early on in *Creed II*? We have to wonder if the older, wiser, and sadder Ezio who spared the murderous Rodrigo Borgia's life in the game's climax

[illegible]



Here it is indeed. Rome in *Brotherhood* won't be a single city inside a larger kingdom; it essentially is the kingdom—four times the size of the largest city in the previous game. To make it a tad more manageable, the metropolis will be divided into four main districts: the bustling downtown, the landmark-rich "antique" Rome, the countryside immediately outside of the city walls, and Tiber Island, sitting in the middle of its titular river in the heart of the city and serving as Ezio's base of operations.

While Ubisoft is keeping mum on key plot details, we do know that once Ezio joins forces with friend and fellow assassin Niccolò Machiavelli and gets settled in at his Tiber Island fortress, *Brotherhood*'s most fascinating new gameplay feature reveals itself: The ability to recruit and train an army of assassins in the war against the templars.

Stroll past the Vatican's St. Peter's Basilica and find some poor schmuck getting a beat-down from Borgias' goons. Help him out, and he may join the cause. Using an in-game menu, Ezio can equip his recruits with weapons and armor and dispatch them on far-flung missions such as assassinating a corrupt official in Frankfurt, stalking a target in Paris, and silencing a templar in Madrid. Ezio won't venture beyond Rome, but his network of minions gives *Brotherhood* an international flavor.

Once the recruits start to get some notches in their dagger belts, Ezio can use the experience points they've

"Rome was too big [for *AC II*]. It was so big, in fact, it could have its own game. And here it is."

would even recognize that carefree kid. When *Brotherhood* opens in the year 1500, the 45-year-old Ezio has completed his personal quest for vengeance, and is now bringing the war to the templars' doorstep in Rome.

Rome wasn't built in a day, though, and as far as Assassin's Creed brand creative director Patrice Desilets and producer Vincent Pontbriand are concerned, it couldn't have been built at all for the previous game.

"When we did location scouting [for *Creed II*] and started to take pictures of Rome and saw all these statues and buildings and landmarks and huge physical spaces, we said, okay, this should be on its own," Pontbriand says.

"It was too big," Desilets agrees. "It was so big, in fact, it could have its own game. And here it is."

accrued to boost their fighting skills, free-running abilities, and so on, then handpick a few—possibly four, but a final number hasn't been decided yet—to act as his personal backup on missions.

Desilets likens this entourage of assassins to air support or a smart bomb: They won't always be tailing Ezio, but can be called in to help out in battles or distract guards—kind of like cooler, on-demand versions of the thieves, mercenaries, and courtisans we already know.

We ask if it would be possible to create a *Charlie's Angels*-style group of backup assassins, all decked out in matching red armor, by only training and mentoring female recruits.

"Hmm," Pontbriand says, "I guess that would be a kind of emergent gameplay."

THEY'RE BACK!

Rome is keeping a lot of secrets, and Assassin's Creed Brotherhood is about to reveal some of them. We've got the inside scoop on the game's new features, including the new multiplayer mode, and the new Assassin's Creed II DLC.

THE HIDDEN ASSASSIN

The hidden assassin is a new type of assassin, one that is not seen by the player. They are the most powerful assassins in the game, and they are the only ones who can be recruited. They are the only ones who can be trained, and they are the only ones who can be used in the game. They are the only ones who can be used in the game.



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STRIKE EARLY, STRIKE OFTEN

The combat system in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* hasn't been drastically overhauled, but Ubisoft is tweaking it to tone down the block-and-bait strategy that proved a little too effective in the last game. Instead of circling and waiting for an instant-kill counter, players will be rewarded for taking the initiative, and can chain together kill-combos from one victim to the next. It that sounds a little like the combat system in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, well, now is that a bad thing?



Ubisoft has revealed three multiplayer maps so far. This one is set in *Assassin's Creed II's* Firenze; Rome and San Donato will also serve as multiplayer settings. There will, of course, be more to come.

The trigger-happy priest was so preoccupied on his prey, he didn't notice the Ezio Auditore lookalike prowler coming up behind him. After this kill, the supposed assassin will be assigned a new target, while the priest reappears after a short delay.

The multiplayer mode's backstory is that it's training modern-day templars to become skilled killers, using a *Matrix*-like simulation within the Animus. Ubisoft hints each multiplayer character will appear in some form in the single-player game too.



The chase is on! While the courtesan is busy pursuing her assigned target, her assassin—this fella here is called the executioner—is watching her. A player's target and his assassin will never be the same person, so stay alert while stalking prey.

If this prowler is smart, he'll seek out a "chasebreaker"—glowing objects in the environment designed to slow down pursuers, like a gate that slams closed as soon as a player passes through it.



This prowler knew his target was in the general vicinity and correctly determined it was this priest—not the AI lookalike standing nearby. His keen observation will be rewarded with extra points for the clean kill.

"On top of this tense game of cat-and-mouse, Ubisoft is adding frantic chase-and-escape sequences that occur when an assassin breaks cover to approach his target... And this is only one of the multiplayer modes on tap."

ASSASSINATION NATION

Ubisoft says *Brotherhood* will contain nearly as much content as *Creed II*, with the return of mainstays like collectible item sets, secret location challenges (yes, one will involve the Colosseum), and a dizzying variety of side-quests—along with the ability to upgrade the entire city of Rome in a manner similar to how Auditeiro improved the area surrounding his Tuscany villa.

But what could make this game even more significant than its predecessors is the introduction of multiplayer—a first for the series. Ubisoft didn't want to pull the trigger on these modes until the developers knew they could create a multiplayer experience that adheres to the core *Assassin's Creed* mechanics. "It

needed to work," Pontbriand says.

Ubisoft is only revealing one of the multiplayer modes right now—there will be adversarial, team-based, and objective-based flavors—but it's a doozy. Called "Wanted," it will drop six to eight players into a not-too-big, not-too-small map, where they will set about stalking each other.

There are a couple of clever catches: Each player picks a unique character model, and begins with a single assigned target, while also being targeted by another unidentified assassin. And each map is teeming with scores of AI-controlled non-playable characters going about their business, most of who are based on the same character models the human players are using.

Play as the doctor, and he might be

given a courtesan target. On-screen indicators point out, roughly, her distance and general direction. But there are lots of courtesans milling about and it's not obvious which one is the target. Stabbing willy-nilly will blow the doctor's cover and make it easier for his assassin to spot him, and players will be penalized for every innocent they kill.

On top of this tense game of cat-and-mouse, Ubisoft is adding frantic chase-and-escape sequences that occur when an assassin breaks cover to approach his target, as well as special abilities like the power to temporarily morph into a different character model to give an assassin the slip, or tossing a smoke bomb to confuse an enemy. And this is only one of the multiplayer modes on tap.



If this nobleman kills his target, he'll score points that not only might help him win the game, but will eventually let him buy character upgrades via a system akin to *Rainbow Six: Vegas*' persistent elite creation (PEC)—only with a more Renaissance-style flair.

This courtesan got the assassin broke cover by running toward her, triggering a chase sequence. If she can get out of his line of sight and blend back in with the crowd (or dive into a haystack), she'll survive and score points.

Each character class will have its own unique weapon, animations, and assassination moves. The doctor here dispatches foes with this poison-tipped syringe.



The first rule of being a doctor: Do no harm. Unless, of course, the patient in question is the good doctor's target. At that point, it behooves the medical professional to stab away with glee.



A MAN AND HIS MOUNT

Given that Ezio Auditore will be operating within a single massive city, he's going to need a faster, more-efficient way to get around than free-running. Assassin's *Crew: Brotherhood* allows Auditore to bring his noble steed within the city walls and Ubisoft is creating a whole new equine-assisted combat system, enabling Auditore to assassinate targets from horseback.

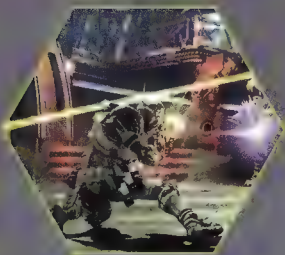
Sadly, ol' Sebastian can't be customized with his own gear. That's unfortunate, but the upside is we'll never be asked to pay for downloadable horse armor.



Feature

Thrill Shot

World Exclusive



VANQUISH

© 2010 SEGA



Fast. Slick. Stylish. Platinum's hotly anticipated new game is a shooter like none other, and we've got the world's first playtest. By Gary Steinman



"I hope I didn't make it look too easy."

We've just died. It's not the first time, and it won't be the final time. That might sound like criticism, but it's not. From what we can tell, *Vanquish* won't be punishingly difficult, but it will smack a player back on his ARS (that's Augmented Reaction Suit to you) if he's not careful.

It feels good, though. The challenge is just right, and once we understood what we needed to do in the handful of diverse situations we encountered, *Vanquish* became well... easier isn't quite the right word. Manageable, perhaps. So the whispered words of concern from the gentleman who handled the controller during our pre-hands-on demonstration weren't necessary. To the contrary, it was rather nice to see what could be done when one knows what one is doing. And it was even

nicer when, after several tries, we got darn close to pulling off a similarly slick series of dodges, dives, shots, and melee attacks with the same balletic rhythm accomplished by our well-practiced host.

PURE PLATINUM

Welcome to *Vanquish*, a third-person shooter from developer Platinum Games, the brilliant, bizarre code shop that brought us the sexy stylings of *Bayonetta*. This is their fourth (and final) game under a publishing deal with Sega, and if our world-exclusive playtest is any indication, the suits at The House That Sonic Built might consider re-upping that deal. Fast.

That's because *Vanquish* is more than just a typical third-person run-and-gun. It's quick, it's frenetic. This is a shooter by way of manga or anime: an impractical number of bullets whizz by, the explosion





TEAM EFFORT

It's a good thing that the game is so focused on the player's perspective, because it's the only way to see the world through the eyes of a man who's been through so much. It's a good thing that the game is so focused on the player's perspective, because it's the only way to see the world through the eyes of a man who's been through so much.

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NEXT MEETING

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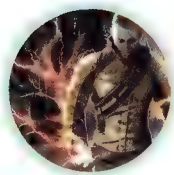
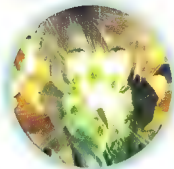
TRIPLE SHOT

Vanquish has all the right stuff

Machine? Unlike *Bayonetta*, which was developed for the Xbox 360 and suffered in the transition, *Vanquish* is being built on PS3 first. That means this time, we get the definitive edition

Multiplayer? None! Why's that a good thing? Because it allows the team to focus on crafting the best possible single-player game. Plus, we're bored with tacked-on multiplayer modes.

Mikami? That's right: Shinji Mikami, the man who fixed *Resident Evil* and launched *Devil May Cry*, is also the director of *Vanquish*. "I wanted to make a shooter where the player is active—taking people on," Mikami says. "I didn't want the game to be like other third-person action titles, where people are just trying to survive, taking pot-shots at enemies from behind cover. So it is this aggression and active spirit that I wanted to capture with *Vanquish*—this is what makes it different from others in the genre."



Mother Knows Best...?



Throughout his childhood, Mitch Dyer's mom used to buy all his games for him—and she always seemed to get it right. But now that Mitchy is all grown up, does his mamma still have the magic touch? By Mitch Dyer

Like everyone else, I always asked my parents to buy games for me. Kids are broke, so whether it was a gift-giving occasion or a typical Tuesday, I hounded mom like crazy for the latest PlayStation games. A list of specifics accompanied each request, aimed at ensuring mother dearest would buy the right game, instead of accidentally grabbing garbage. She didn't need it, though. Even on the odd occasion when she nabbed something I'd never mentioned, it was a topnotch title.

Now I'm 22 years old. I've moved out of my parents' house. I no longer have the luxury of mom piling PlayStation games onto my shelf. Which got me thinking: Does mom still have it in her to guess what games I'd like? So I skimmed through a stack of recent PS3 releases with my mom to find out.



Illustration by Robert Cortez

"I'd rather see you learn something meaningful
while playing games, and I don't mean what kind
of ammo a sawed-off shotgun takes."





FINAL FANTASY XIII

Mom: *Final Fantasy XIII?* Really, 13? What happened to the *final*? Isn't it the last one? Isn't it finished? You don't get 13 chances! That doesn't make any sense. I'll tell you my final fantasy: You only get one *Final Fantasy*, not thirteen. Oh, and that girl on the cover [Lightning]? She looks like she's about 12. What's up with that? There's no way I would buy this for you.

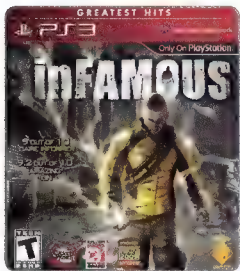
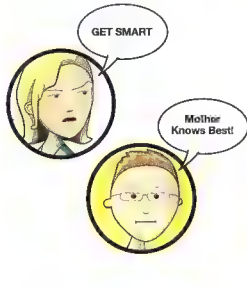
Mitch: I'm not the biggest fan of Japanese role-playing games as a genre, and I completely agree that the whole "final" aspect of *Final Fantasy* is absurd. This is actually a long-running joke in videogame culture; I'm glad you could recognize that immediately. I think the character looks cool, though. Still, as nice as the game looks, it's not really up my alley. Skipping this was for the best.



3D DOT GAME HEROES

Mom: I like this! Just from looking at pictures, I feel like you build everything out of blocks, and like you're creating a city and defending it. I would buy *3D Dot Game Heroes* for you because it seems like you need to be creative, and like you're using your imagination more so than a weapon. I'm your mother, and I think you should use your brain and not weapons. Weapons are not the answer...unless you're really pissed.

Mitch: Yikes, I'm glad I stayed on your good side. You're right in that *3D Dot Game Heroes* absolutely includes that creative aspect you're looking for—and even though it's more action-oriented than you expected, I think you'd be all right with this kind of cartoony violence. I mean, you build a dude, and then use him to bash blocky baddies to bits. Plus, I can use my brain as a weapon!



INFAMOUS

Mom: Oh, this looks good! I feel bad for that guy on the front. He looks like a common man, a hard worker. What is he? A deliveryman? He's delivering something, I'll tell you. Looking at the cover though, I get the feeling I'm gonna be disappointed. [She looks at screenshots.] Yep, I'm disappointed. The game has an almost cartoony look to it, but the cover looks realistic. I'd still buy it for you for your birthday or something. I think you'd enjoy it.

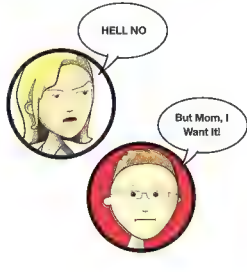
Mitch: That cartoony look is an attempt at replicating a comic book presentation, which I do think is cool. *Infamous* had a lot of fantastic ideas, and the exploratory nature of its gameplay was excellent. There were aspects of the game that I didn't love, like its characters and storyline, but overall the action and lead character Cole MacGrath's supercharged powers were awesome. Good call with this one, ma.



GOD OF WAR III

Mom: [Referring to Kratos] That guy looks like trouble...he's definitely a bully and I don't like him. He's a freak, he has masacara on, and he looks like the devil. Look at that picture: They're having a hoedown in hell. Do people really buy this? I mean, what is the world coming to? What parent would buy *God of War* for their kids? Not this one. I don't care if you're 22, I'm not buying it. I don't care if you like it, that doesn't mean you get it.

Mitch: I hate to admit it, but you're pretty much all around spot-on on this one. Still, I love *God of War*. Kratos is a huge jerk, his look isn't job-interview friendly, and it's alarming to consider a parent giving her child something this gory and violent. But that mindless, gratuitous violence is what makes the *God of War* games so great for me. Can I just play when you're not looking? Pretty please? Besides, it teaches me about Greek mythology!

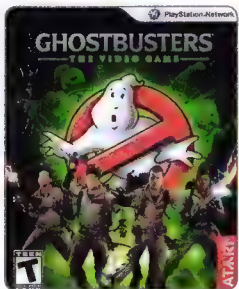
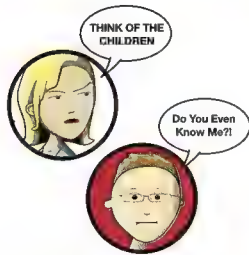




MODNATION RACERS

Mom: This kinda looks like a kids' game, for like eight and under. I'd buy this to have at the house, but not necessarily for you. I'd buy it for your nieces and nephews to play. I don't think it matches your personality; it's too kiddo. When a kid sees that they can drive a car, and they get their own goggles and helmet, they don't even need the game to be good. Maybe this encourages kids to wear helmets too.

Mitch: I love how you're always looking for a lesson in games; it's very optimistic of you. *Racers*' flexible customization, which is where those interchangeable goggles and helmets play into the game, is great for tapping into creativity. I also dig the wacky characters and colorful world. I think it looks neat, even if it is "kiddo looking." I guess if you won't buy it for me, I'll play it with the cousins when I visit you.



GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

Mom: A *Ghostbusters* game? Sold! I'd buy this because *Ghostbusters* is a classic. If I walked in and saw you playing this, I'd tell you all about the whole movie. Parents and kids can't talk much about their interests because they're so different, but I would watch you play this to see the stuff from the movie, and we'd have something new to talk about after. Oh, look at the ghost in the logo, he's so cute. They could never catch him. I would definitely pick this up for you.

Mitch: *Ghostbusters* is a great way to bridge the generation gap. It's a terrific bonus that the game is good, and that it pays such respect to the movies. I would love to sit down and play this with you, because I also think you'd like it, but for more reasons than "it's a *Ghostbusters* game." Harold Ramis and Dan Aykroyd wrote the storyline, and it's basically like another chapter in the movie series. We'd have a proton blast! You sure know how to pick 'em, mom.



UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

Mom: What's this? Hey, this guy is really good lookin'. I'd buy it just because I like the guy. I don't know if I like that you're a thief though. Maybe if you were just hanging out with thieves, but really, stealing isn't good. Well, if he's the Indiana Jones-type and he's digging up what he's stealing, well, there's nothing wrong with that. That's just archeology, isn't it? There's definitely an Indiana Jones kind of thing going on.

Mitch: Buying this one is a solid choice, mother, thank you! *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is a great game, and you're spot on about the Indy-like aspect of the treasure thieving. That similar mix of daring jumps and dangerous shootouts makes this a great game. I mean, Nathan Drake is one sharp-looking chap, that's for sure, but he's not why I dig the game. Chloe Frazer on the other hand...Meow!



HEAVY RAIN

Mom: [Referencing the box art] It looks like the A-Team there. These are a cool bunch of people who have their sh-t together. They're gonna mess somebody up. I'd buy this for you, sure. This guy [Scott Shelby] needs to relax, though. He looks angry. They all look like upstanding people—except her [Madison]. I wouldn't trust her for a minute. I'd never tell her anything. She's sneaky.

Mitch: It's freaky how much you picked up from just looking at these characters. Unless you've played *Heavy Rain*, you can't understand how closely you nailed it. Another fine purchase. Thanks, mom!

YOUR MOM! Is she as game-savvy as Mitch's mom? Did she deliver when you asked for *Dragon Age: Origins* or did you end up with *How to Train Your Dragon* instead? Send your Mommo Dearest tales to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.





Q Factor

Puttin' the funk in the Junk

By Douglass C. Perry

It began as an obscure mash-up of no particular importance, but ever since Q-Games first revealed *PixelJunk Racers* in July 2007, the words "Pixel" and "Junk" have become synonymous with 2D cool. ¶ Founded by PlayStation-tech and game-guru Dylan Cuthbert, Q-Games has

quickly achieved beloved cult status as the 2D PlayStation Network developer because of its unique genre-challenging games, which started with *Racers* and continued with *PixelJunk Monsters*, *Eden*, and *Shooter*. Cuthbert's mantra for the *PixelJunk* series—which averages a new incarnation every eight months—is to start with well-tread genres, then challenge our expectations of them. *Racers*, for example, seems to be a straightforward top-down arcade racing game featuring little slot cars. But players aren't just racing; they're solving puzzles and mastering challenges while competing with as many as 80 other cars. And while it's very approachable, *Racers'* wild on-screen action is also punishingly tough. Meanwhile, *PixelJunk Shooter* might seem to be just another 2D shooter, but its unique mechanics, gorgeous setting, and liquid-like physics set it apart. ¶ In less than three years, this little 40-person studio in Kyoto, Japan, has produced four original *PixelJunk* games, a handful of expansion packs and PSP

ports, and—counting its Nintendo DS games—six other titles in 2009 alone. But it's only now that Q-Games is really hitting its stride. Along with its back catalog (all currently available on PSN), gamers will discover the high-octane challenges of *PixelJunk Racers 2nd Lap* (a full sequel to the original) and, in our world-exclusive reveal, *PixelJunk Shooter 2*. ¶ What better time to take a look back at Q-Games' quirky, elegant, and unpredictable titles? We sat down with Cuthbert to uncover why a

25-year industry veteran has eschewed high-profile console productions to focus entirely on 2D games. And perhaps more importantly, what special design ingredients do Cuthbert and his team bring to their "little" games to make them so incredibly deep and fun to play.



PIXELJUNK RACERS

What is it? A high-def, top-down, slot-car racing game that's more puzzle-solving than pure driving. *Racers* offers a whopping 32 modes, 10 courses, and a seven-person offline multiplayer option.

Why we love it The first *PixelJunk* game, *Racers* is simple, pretty, and challenging. But, alas, due to repetitive courses and an unreasonably tough AI, it isn't necessarily a word we'd apply to it. The lack of online multiplayer doesn't help either. Still, the goofy modes—like treating other cars to stay alive or dodging and passing opponents to become a fireball that blasts through rivals or blowing our car up and releasing it like a balloon to propel forward—all bring a smile to our faces.

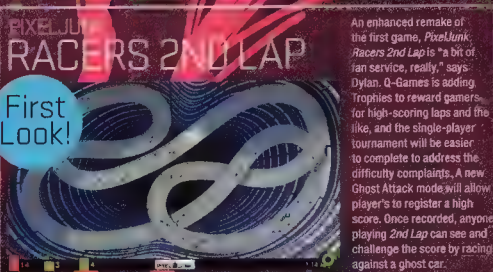
Dylan's proudest accomplishment "I'd say the variation that we managed to put into *Racers*. I really like playing with people's preconceptions. If they think it's a racing game, we come in and invoke people's

imagination. Look at *Rally-X*, that old arcade racing game that was more like *Pac-Man*—that's where we're coming from. We want to shake up all those old 2D arcade games and put them into a different format.

Dylan's biggest disappointment "Because it was our first game, we made it a little too difficult for some people. We remedied that in the second one, *Racers Encore*. We were really making it for ourselves. We realized after we released it that perhaps it was a bit too difficult. We do listen to our fans. When we hear good criticism, we take it into account."

Dylan chickens out? "Just about the time we were shipping *Racers*, I drove up to this huge outdoor concert in Tokyo and I caught chicken pox. It knocked me out for three weeks, so it was sort of a weird limbo period for me. *Racers* was almost done, then I went down, and when I came back out of this surreal haze, the game had shipped. At the very least, it was an interesting start to the series."

↑ *Racers* might look simple, but it's easily one of the most challenging games on PSN.



An enhanced remake of the first game, *PixelJunk Racers 2nd Lap* is "a bit of an service, really," says Dylan. 0-Games is adding Trophies to reward gamers for high-scoring laps and the like, and the single-player tournament will be easier to complete to address the difficulty complaints. A new Ghost Attack mode will allow players to register a high score. Once recorded, anyone playing *2nd Lap* can see and challenge the score by racing against a ghost car.

First Look!



← Best tower defense game on PSN? No doubt about it.

12 PIXELJUNK 79

PIXELJUNK

RELEASE: January 04, 2008
PRICE: \$9.99
METACRITIC SCORE: 83 (out of 100)

MONSTERS



play is the real deal, requiring communication, planning, and teamwork.

Proudest accomplishment "We put a lot of effort into balancing *Monsters*. There's a lot of very

What is it? Q-Games' take on tower defense, a simple real-time strategy genre made popular on PC. Players strategically fend off waves of monsters from attacking their home base by building and researching defensive structures. A two-player offline mode offers a unique co-op twist.

Why we love it *Monsters* features charming childlike hand-drawn graphics, crisp HD visuals, and a captivating soundtrack by Otograph. The mix of trial-and-error gameplay and later-level difficulty is challenging but sublimely balanced, elevating a simple concept to obscenely addictive heights. Co-op

exquisite balance you have to put into making a tower defense game. You really have to think about how you introduce new weapons and abilities, and we tried to pace that well. I'd also add that the cooperative play is unique."

Biggest disappointment "There isn't any regret for *Monsters*. It came out really well. We were very pleased with it."

Dylan can dance "The dancing on the towers really added that kind of cute side to it. It gave people something to do while they waited for the next wave of monsters."



PIXELJUNK EDEN

RELEASE: JULY 5, 2010
PRICE: \$9.99
METACRITIC SCORE: 89 (out of 100)

What is it? Unlike the other games, *PixelJunk Eden* doesn't easily fit into any genre we know of because it's a *pollination* game. Players control a "grimp" (grip+jump), which looks like a tadpole, and the goal is to explore a series of gardens (edens), pollinate planet-like structures, and collect five different spectra by jumping, gripping, swinging, and growing—all set against a gorgeous backdrop with entrancing electronica music.

Why we love it Because we love to pollinate? Or, perhaps, it's because the gameplay is rooted in classic platforming but tweaks the standard approach with an organic winch mechanic and low-gravity physics. But it's only the half of it: The graphics and music were created in collaboration with indie Kyoto artist and musical composer Baiyon (Tomohisa Kuramitsu). The game's explorative nature meshes perfectly with the dreamy setting and soundtrack.

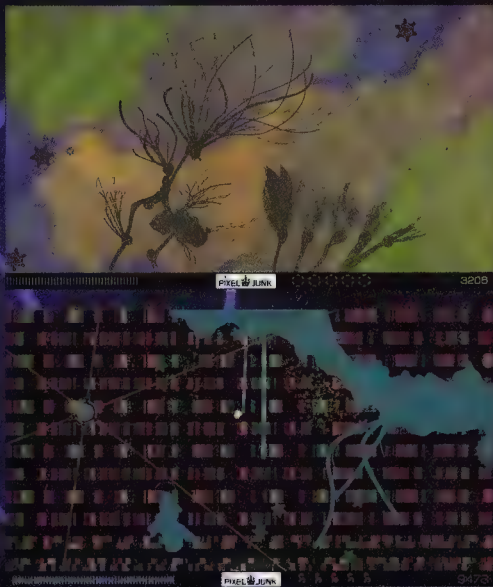
Proudest accomplishment "I think the whole organic feel to the game turned out well. The way the plants grow and jump, and you set off combos, and there is pollen flying everywhere."

Biggest disappointment "The only thing we would fix is to permit players to go back into the levels to get the spectra. We didn't have the time or the systems to do it."

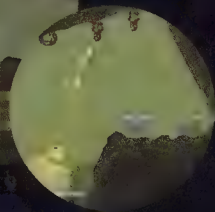
Dylan's garden "One of the initial problems we had with the game was that if you have a complex plant, there are lots of places to hit it. If you had simple, solid collision detection, you'd just hit it, like a brick, and there would be no way to get through it. So we had to create a way for players to go through plants or grip the plants, if they want to. So we added this spin-and-grip move that works really well. From there on, the game really developed quickly."



↑ Abstract and obtuse, *Eden* has an undeniable charm that elevates it into art-game realm.



← Rescuing every trapped miner can be quite the challenge in *Shooter*.



HEAT

PIXELJUNK

x 52

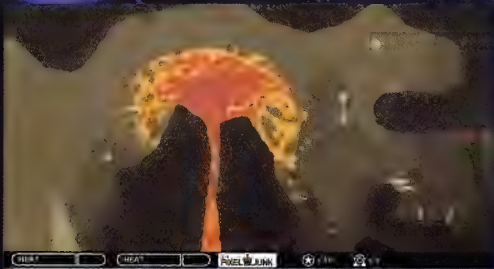
x 97

100

PIXELJUNK

RELEASE: December 10, 2009
PRICE: \$9.99
METACRITIC SCORE: 86 (OUT OF 100)

SHOOTER



What is it? A 2D, side-view shooter that involves a heavy dose of exploration, action, and puzzle solving.

Why we love it Yes, *PixelJunk Shooter* looks like a simple shoot-and-explore game. But like everything Q-Games has produced, it's packed with unique mechanics, twists on traditional gameplay ideas, and brain-bending new approaches to game physics. But the most interesting aspect of *Shooter* (besides the expert level design) is the ability

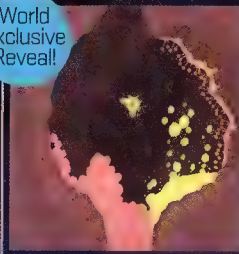
to manipulate water, lava, and other liquids in order to solve puzzles.

Proudest accomplishment "The obvious things about *Shooter* are the physics and the dynamics—the interaction of fluids. But the non-obvious thing is the entire flow and balance of the game. We put a lot of time and effort into giving the game the right balance. You know, feeding stuff to the player in a really comfortable way as they play through the game. It has a nice rhythm and flow. The music matches it really well."

Biggest disappointment None.

Dylan gets comfortable "When we made *Eden*, we didn't have the time or the resources to do the things that we would have made it a better game. When *Monsters* came out, we didn't realize how huge a hit it was going to be. We released *Monsters*, which we were developing in parallel with *Eden*, so we didn't quite have the confidence we needed at that point. But with *Shooter*, because of the success of *Monsters* and *Eden*, we had the confidence we needed. We just said, 'screw the time and the resources, and do everything we needed to do. We were really pleased with our results. A lot of people are getting used to our darkness, and I think that's a good thing. When people get a *PixelJunk* game, they should expect that they won't get what they expect.'"

World
Exclusive
Reveal!



PIXELJUNK SHOOTER 2

Before moving to an entirely new genre, Q-Games is creating a sequel to its most popular game in the series, *PixelJunk Shooter*. Picking up where the first game's story left off, *Shooter 2* puts players in the boots of a rescue team searching for the hero's lost ship on planet Apox Prime.

The new story mode contains three previously unseen worlds to explore, a fresh set of new stages, plenty of survivors to rescue and treasures to collect. With every newly opened stage, players will discover how to use (and be wary of) new liquids—a key element in the first title.

Just like in *PixelJunk Racers 2nd Lap*, Q-Games has implemented a Ghost Race in *Shooter 2*. This mode records level scores and posts them to high-ranking tables and friends lists, so players can race against each other's top ghost races. English made duo High Frequency Bandwidth will provide a new soundtrack to accompany *Shooter 2*.

The biggest addition, however—and a *PixelJunk* series first—is the introduction of head-to-head online modes. Q-Games created specially designed arenas for the online component and share will have a voice chat support.

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WITHOUT
CLIPPING

Reviews

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STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

5 STARS: **Legendary**

A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

4 STARS: **Great**

A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

3 STARS: **Enjoyable**

If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

2 STARS: **Scorred**

A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: **Flop**

We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

SPLIT/SECOND

The Michael Bay of kart racers. And that's a very good thing.



PRICE: \$49.99 MSRP | PLATFORMS: PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One | PUBLISHER: Sony | DEVELOPER: Sledge Games



Who needs manufacturers' licenses when we have a license to destroy?



➔ Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but kart/combat racers are all but dead. And homing missiles and mines are almost boring at this point. And yet here we are with the two new contenders in what's supposed to be a lifeless genre. (Flip ahead a few pages for our take on *ModNation Racers*.) So how does *Split/Second* find itself in the pole position of a race that shouldn't even exist? Simple: It puts us in the driver's seat of Michael Bay's brain. Seriously.

Here, we find the gorgeously detailed urban tracks—mutant offspring of Los Angeles and Mi-

ami—populated by glistening hotrods apparently named after Italian mobsters. ("I'd like you meet some *friends of ours*: Ryback and Corbetti.") Players are presented with seemingly mundane locales such as airports, shipyards, and industrial parks and then tasked to tear them down, brick by brick, as they vie for first place.

It's like a throwback to the glory days of classic arcade racers—back when these games were just as serious as today's *Gran Turismo*s. Some younglings out there might not recall a time before there were PlayStations on every mantle, but in

that bygone era, the only way arcade games could grab our attention was with something dizzying and bombastic, the likes of which we'd never experienced. Much like how blockbuster movies pour millions of dollars into outdoing television, arcade developers knew game fans weren't going to bite unless their senses were assaulted with pulse-pounding sound and fury. Well, after winning a race by crashing a runaway cruise liner into numerous opponents, we can confirm that *Split/Second* is nothing if not remarkably distinctive and theatrical.

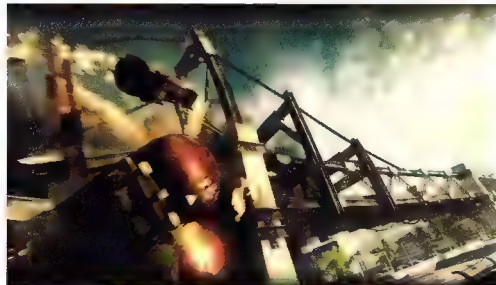
Heated Competition

Split/Second's all about the Power Play: the ability to detonate lethal aspects of each massive environment to remake opponents into slow-moving shrapnel. Activate a wrecking ball, explode a parked fuel liner in the face of a passerby, or bring down a bridge girder on top of somebody—and those are just the level one Power Plays. Put the Power Play meter in the red and we're a button press away from using trains, planes, and heavily armed helicopters as show-stopping projectiles of hard-earned chaos.

Split/Second's racing action will give any summer movie blockbuster a run for its money.



Initiating—or surviving—Power Plays is the key to winning races.



“We’re a button press away from using trains, planes, and helicopters as show-stopping projectiles.”

Drivers aren’t handed these abilities. Nor are there nodes on the track to drive over to gain a random weapon. Instead, the game rewards skillful driving: Drafting opponents, drifting turns, and avoiding destructive accidents are the tools needed to chip away at the track environment and unleash hell. We’ll admit we were skeptical about this mechanic, yet we quickly found that it overcomes the randomness in other soft-shelled combat racers by rewarding effort, not luck.

Not only does it take finesse to earn Power Plays, but performing a well-executed one requires precise timing as well. Just being in a Power Play’s blast radius is like being kicked in the head by a surly donkey—the momentary concussion leaves our vehicle vulnerable and ever-so-slightly out of control. Yet it’s by no means an insta-kill, and nearly every catastrophe has a sweet spot where it’s possible to coast through unscathed.

Power Plays also open up time-shaving shortcuts and even tiered levels of glorious mayhem. Take down an airport control tower and it’ll not only block off the standard course, but on the next lap players will be sent down a runway right into the path of a wayward plane. Blowing up a bridge doesn’t just obliterate any opponent driving on it, but it’s also a tactical move that can open up an alternate course with more shortcuts and explosives. Yes, Mr. Bay, this is the game for you.

And for all the wickedly over-the-top collateral damage, there’s a surprising amount of depth buried beneath *Split/Second*’s rubble. Even the time trial events (traditionally the most boring and uninspired aspect of all racing games) serve a higher purpose by pitting drivers directly against the environment. Instead of focusing on the best driving line or the braking points to take a turn, racers can learn to dodge falling rocks, avoid explosions, and survive about a billion other calamities.

↓ Cinematic Crash Course

Split/Second is presented like an episodic Hollywood production. We'd hate to see any would-be racers wander into the proceedings like a deer in headlights, so we recommend firing up these Blu-rays in preparation.

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE

SPLIT/SECOND



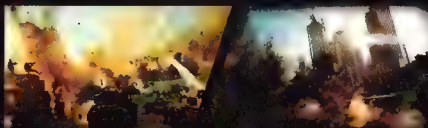
DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE

During one of the greatest movie openings of all time, a street-level explosion sends folks diving for cover as if they were in a poolside musical number. Take note of anything lining *Split/Second*'s environment that looks like it may contain flammable liquids. It usually does!



TERMINATOR 2

Survival mode features a frenzied chase through a Los Angeles culvert, similar to one in a certain James Cameron film with a musclobound politician. Players must avoid a pack of psychotic big rigs that, for example, can plow off a bridge to squash drivers below.



TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

We asked Black Rock Studio what movies inspired the look of *Split/Second*: "We really loved the way that movies like *Transformers* feature constant action and large-scale action sequences, but keep things upbeat at all times."



HOOPER

Bringing the environment down around you means a lot of falling structures. If you can somehow remember Burt Reynolds outrunning a collapsing tower in this 1978 classic(?), try to imagine that scenario occurring every 30 seconds. No mustache required.



THE ISLAND

It took Ewan McGregor a second to untie a truck's payload and take down his pursuers during a high-speed chase. *Split/Second* does that repeatedly during online Survival multiplayer matches.



“We were laughing with childlike glee, still uncovering new ways to decimate any driver foolish enough to step on the track with us.”





Fast, Faster, Fastest?

Standard modes like race, time trial, and elimination are fantastic even though they don't break the mold. However, *Split/Second* has a couple of smaller objectives peppered throughout it that are wonderfully innovative asides: Survival chucks its drivers into an urban culvert against a pack of fearsome big rigs that hurl explosive barrels to impede or destroy the competition. Each time the player successfully threads barrels and passes another semi, more time is added to the clock. Air Strike features a faceoff between car and... military helicopter. Deftly dodging waves of incoming missiles racks up a point multiplier for some killer combos. Think such an unbalanced pairing is unfair? Later in the game

the mode turns the tables, and building up the Power Play meter can be used to deflect missiles back at the chopper.

Complaints are few, but the absence of a speedometer is irksome. Cars get tossed around so much that the game's guardrails practically serve as steering aids, but it's difficult to visually determine whether there's an actual speed penalty for grinding against them. The combination drift/brake button is tons of fun as well, but there's no telling if the slip-slidy maneuvers are an efficient means of maintaining speed. Unlocked cars carry increased stats, but again, we had a tough time verifying the power increase because we couldn't see a needle bouncing to reflect increased velocity.

But there's really no point splitting hairs about whether a car is fast, faster, or fastest when the rubberbanding AI ensures that someone will always be nipping at our tailpipe—no matter how well we race. The upside is that the heat's always on (affording plenty of opportunity for Power Play theatrics), but it does undermine the satisfaction racers get from mastering a game's skill curve.

Maximum Performance

It's easy to recognize *Split/Second*'s absolutely jaw-dropping looks, but it's much more of a compliment to acknowledge the whip-crackin' camera, dizzying sense of speed, and cataclysmic moments that damn near reach doomsday level—all achieving new visual heights for the PS3. Best of

all, by the 11th hour, *Split/Second* had us doing something few racing games can accomplish: It kept us smiling.

Even when the game reaches higher difficulties we were laughing with childlike glee, still uncovering new ways to decimate any driver foolish enough to step on the track with us. Quite simply, nothing compares to the feeling of careening around the withered, burnt-to-a-crisp husks of opponents that we recently annihilated with godlike pyrotechnics. *Split/Second* is a glorious departure from everything that's come before. And for racing fans who've grown bored of a slavish adherence to realism but still crave realistic graphics, it stands to revitalize the whole genre. | Chris Antista

Rating



↑ Charging Ahead

Drifting through turns, slippstreaming, passing, and jumping are the keys to building up the Power Play meter. As a car's three-segment power bar fills up, the driver can trigger increasingly more powerful explosions to attack competitors or open up track shortcuts. Keep in mind every other racer has the ability too, and "Close Calls" with opponent detonations also boost your Power Play meter.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS

As memorable as its title suggests

PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

It doesn't take long for the Prince himself to become listless. Never mind he's in the midst of an epic quest to save not just his big brother but the entire kingdom from an otherworldly menace. And put aside the fact our Prince has a host of new powers to play with, both in combat and during his acrobatic clambering. Right now—by rough estimate, perhaps two-thirds through this dozen-hour game—the Prince is *still* stuck in the castle he arrived at when the game began, and he's none too pleased.

"Who builds these things?" our hero wonders. And we can't help but echo his question. After all, this castle already had gigantic walls to keep intruders out. What possible purpose do all these internal traps serve? And

more to the point: Will we ever leave?

The answer, in short, is no. *Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands* is set wholly in one place. Oh sure, we get to leap upstairs to the rooftop gardens and slide down below to where the djinn doth dwell (don't believe them when they call it the Djinn City—it's the basement), but it's all just one location. With lots of traps. And enough running water to make us wonder if this palace, all by itself, is the reason for the parched, sandy world that lurks beyond its walls.

A Princely Sum

The lesson here? Be careful what you wish for. After the illustrative, magical 2008 reboot (which, apparently, didn't quite light up the sales charts to the extent it was hoped), we've been led

to believe what we *really* wanted was a return to the PS2 series—perhaps even a true sequel to first game in that trilogy, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Now, here we are, seven years later, and this is what we get.

To clarify, this isn't a movie game. It's piggybacking on the blockbuster movie-hype machine, sure. The timing of this release couldn't be more perfect. And yet, despite the fact that it stands alone, *Sands* feels an awful lot like a movie game. A good one, certainly—but that's grading on a curve. At times, we couldn't shake the feeling *Sands* is rushed, unpolished, unfinished. Little problems abound, like recurring graphical glitches with floating bits of those ever-present urns we shatter to refresh our health and magic. Camera angles are awkward, hampering the precision platforming. (Do we leap forward? Or to the left? Neither?) And the story is an uninspired series of clichés built around

Oh, Brother

Meet Malik, the Prince's big brother. Mentor, rival, foe—he's the one we initially fight for, then eventually fight against. Go ahead and guess how it turns out—you'll probably be right.



» Building code requires that every castle have one of these doohickies in them.

Classic acrobatic maneuvers stand as perfect reminders of why *Prince of Persia* has endured for so long as a beloved franchise.



sibling rivalry and the corrupting influence of power, with an ending we spotted from clear across the Persian desert.

And yet, the game is *fun*. At its best, *Prince of Persia* is about the joy of movement, picking out the right path, then getting from points A to Z in style. Classic maneuvers such as sliding down banners using our sword to slow our descent, or running across

walls while avoiding rotating saws and swinging pendulums, or leaping from flagpoles to posts and back again—all stand as perfect reminders of why *Persia* has endured for so long as a beloved franchise.

Elemental, My Dear Prince

But it's not just the old stuff that amuses. A few new elements—or new *elementals*, to be more precise—add to the combat and clambering. These come courtesy of Razia, our djinn helper whom we encounter at various

points throughout the game to get more story (yawn) and receive new powers (Yay!).

The most exciting addition: The ability to freeze and unfreeze water at will, by holding the controller's L2 trigger. Waterfalls become walls to climb or cross. Fountains become columns for grappling and swinging. Later in the game, we also gain the ability to “recall” bits of missing architecture from the past, but only one piece at a time. This eventually creates all kinds of finger-twisting

challenges where we had to alternate among all four shoulder buttons (the other two handle the wall-running and the time-rewinding for when we inevitably mess up)—any two of which might be pressed at once in varying combinations. Yes, it got frustrating now and again, but it also taxed us in a new way, forcing us to plan our movements and then execute them with perfect precision.

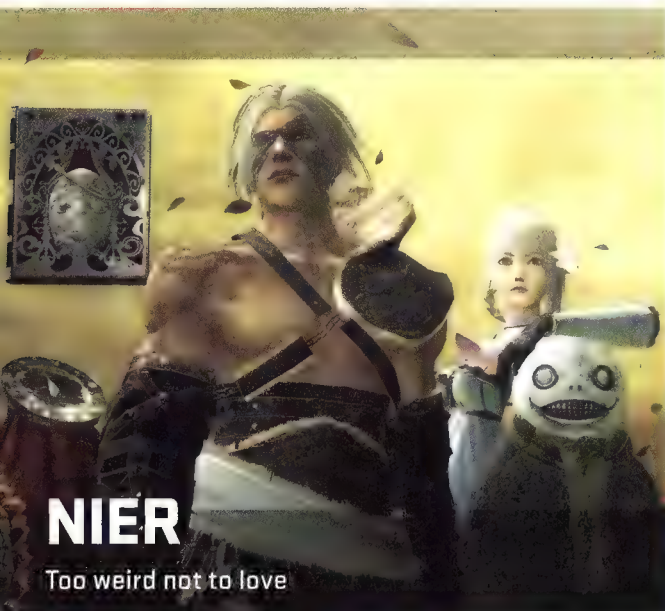
Combat—never a strong point in *Persia* games—has also been improved, with a progression system based around elemental powers (earth for shields, wind for blasts, etc.). In *Sands*, it's all about crowd control, using these powers along with some very satisfying swordplay and thudding kicks to take on hordes of skeletons and other baddies all at once. There's not a whole lot to it, but it manages to provide a satisfying thrill at almost every turn. Too bad we can't say the same for the puzzles. While the acrobatic challenges were often enjoyable, the handful of pure lever-and-crank brainbusters seemed designed solely to frustrate.

There's an old saying about carnal knowledge and pizza—how even at its worst, it's still good. The same applies to *Persia*. Despite *Sands* being a lesser (albeit solid) series entry, it's still an enjoyable romp, worth playing but as forgettable, perhaps, as a one-night stand. | Gary Steinman



» Now elemental powers are nice, but nothing beats the ol' sword for slicing bosses.

Rating ★★★★★



NIER

Too weird not to love

PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Cavia

At first glance, it's easy to mistake *Nier* for something horrible. Its dull visuals and washed-out colors have the look of a latter-day PS2 game. Its *Legend of Zelda*-inspired action is, at the outset, simplistic even by action role-playing game standards, and most of its optional tasks are fetch-quests so shockingly dull, even the characters offering them seem surprised anyone would accept them.

That last detail, however, reveals a hint of what makes *Nier* special. As it turns out, its obvious flaws hide a wonderfully bizarre, goofy game with genuinely lovable characters, a surreal puzzle of a storyline, and a seeming inability to nail down its own genre, with action that switches regularly from action-platforming to side-scrolling to *Diablo*-style dungeon-crawling to a multiple-choice text adventure. And all along, the game winkingly prods at its fourth wall, letting players know that the weird plot, oddball characters, and towering monsters shouldn't be taken completely seriously.

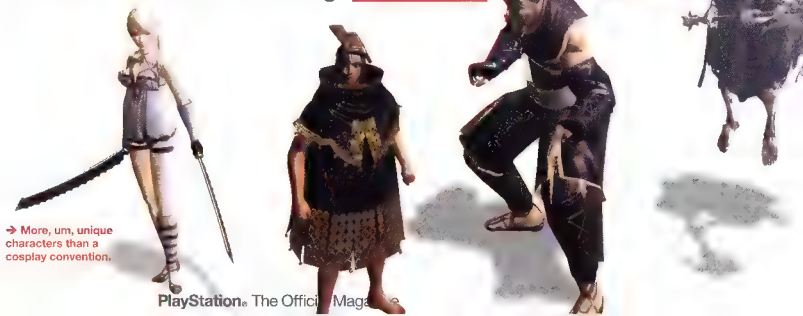
That's a good thing, too, because otherwise *Nier* might get pretty

grim. Taking place (mostly) 1300 years in the future, *Nier* envisions a world where humanity has nearly been eradicated by a disease called the Black Scrawl, which has also flooded the Earth with ghostly monsters called shades. Enter Nier, a mercenary/handyman whose personality falls somewhere between that of a world-weary badass and an idealistic Japanese RPG boy-hero. Desperate to save his sick daughter from the Scrawl, he embarks on a quest to cure the disease, eventually teaming up with a haughty talking book that gives him access to dark magic—as well as a floating skeleton mage and a hermaphroditic

swordswoman who utters obscene threats that'd make action hero Duke Nukem blush.

Over time, the action improves dramatically (thanks largely to the powerful magic attacks and weapons Nier eventually gets to use), and what begins as a strange little RPG narrative gradually becomes a deeply engaging story, supported by amazing writing, acting, and music. Unfortunately, the game too frequently bogs itself down with schlepping, grinding, repetition, and stiff, awkward combat. *Nier* can be surprisingly rewarding, but learning to appreciate its bizarre charms does require patience. | Mikel Reparaz

Rating ★★★★★



→ More, um, unique characters than a cosplay convention.



❗ Narrative, not action, is the star of *Nier*.



↓ (Don't) Make up Your Mind!

Nier deviates from its own action role-playing game formula pretty frequently, sometimes with awesome results. Here's some of what we experienced: Top-down, bubble-filled rooms, as seen in arcade titles such as *Smash TV*; a self-aware text adventure; one homage to *Resident Evil*'s Spencer Mansion, complete with fixed camera angles; a mine cart that suddenly turns into a top-down shooter; and *Diablo*-style dungeons viewed from an isometric viewpoint.





↑ The run-out animations (when we miss a trick but don't fall) look amazingly natural.

SKATE 3

Express yourself...again

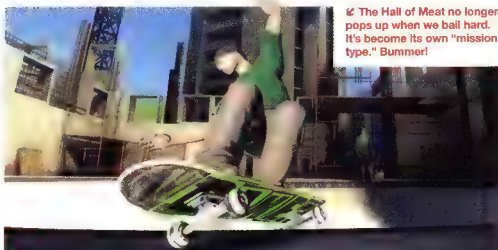
PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Black Box

When *Skate 2* landed last January, it introduced necessary adjustments and additions to the original's winning formula: on-foot action, movable objects, competitive play against friends for the most bone-shattering balls—not to mention a whole arsenal of new tricks. *Skate 3* isn't as big a step forward for the franchise, but it does take many of the previous games' ideas and perfects them, leading to a more polished and well-rounded experience.

The flick-it controls (which utilize the Right-analog stick for execut-

ing flip tricks) feel tighter and more precise than ever, as do the physics. As a result, the simple act of landing a trick, nearly any trick, produces an immense burst of satisfaction, though longtime *Skate* fans who are fatigued by the formula might pine for something fresh. The off-board controls have been vastly improved as well—as in, they actually work now.

Other improvements include a more intuitive video-editing system; a stronger and more streamlined online multiplayer component; adjustable difficulties (for more forgiving controls and landings); and an upgraded park editor that allows



players to drop objects (such as ramps and rails) anywhere in the world or build an entire skate park from scratch. The creative tools the game places in the hands of its users are truly impressive.

Skate 3 also features brand-new city and career modes, but these additions—though still positive—aren't quite as welcome as the others. The world feels cleaner and brighter than ever before, but it also feels more fragmented and less believable, with large open spaces and outlandish (albeit skate-friendly) structures. The career mode takes a page from

Tony Hawk's playbook, challenging us to complete all kinds of hyper-specific objectives. Fortunately, we can avoid this tedious and aggravation; the objective is simply to sell skateboards, something we can accomplish in any number of ways, such as uploading our replays and skate parks to the game's website.

Though we miss the earnest realism of the original game, *Skate 3* offers the most complete package thus far, so feel free to hop on board. | Scott Butterworth

Video editor clips can look like professionally cut trailers.



Rating ★★★★★





What comes next?
Hey! Bust a move.

DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION

Dog eat groin

PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Namco Bandal DEVELOPER: Volatile Games

The touching story of a homicidal cop and his groin-eating canine, *Dead to Rights: Retribution* reminds us all that a violent death is never as far away as we would hope. In fact, as *Retribution* would have it: a violent death is as certain a thing as corporate malfeasance, gluttony at the all-you-can-eat buffet, and a 10-point drop in intelligence quotient points after a viewing of *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot!*

Jack Slate shoots people the way a lesser man might, say, stop to tie his shoelaces when they're undone. He slides-and-glides in the third-person perspective through a not-so-grand conspiracy, divesting suckers of their firearms and then blasting them in the face. At times, Slate can pummel his opponents with furious fisticuffs, performing gruesome finishing moves involving shattered arm bones and snapped necks. Also, he can direct his groin-chomping mutt Shadow to assault enemies, which should be preceded with "Chopper, sic balls!" but sadly is not.

Although the blood-spray operatic is cacophonous, the game offers little else. *Retribution* provides for slow-motion massacres via Slate's focus mode, but this has been done, and done more dramatically with deliciously overdone hero dives and rolls, by the original *Dead to Rights*. The game also cloaks itself in a ridiculous and oftentimes debilitating darkness, something that can only partially be corrected in the game's options menu. At times, Slate must plod through the enemy's headquarters, a facility that is comically unlit given the organization's massive resources. It's ambience for the sake of ambience, and it succeeds

only in highlighting how difficult it is to see, well, *anything*. Pardon the cliché, but the silver lining is quickly evident: the darkness does an adequate job of concealing *Retribution's* jumped-up PlayStation 2 game visuals.

Further damnation can be had whenever Slate needs a key or key card or respite from his own misdeeds. Shadow is playable in stages, dining on groins until there are no more groins to eat. File this under S for stealth or, more appropriately, S for something to clean up with a small shovel, or perhaps disposable gloves. | Greg Orlando

Rating ★★★★★



← This electricity gun works best when charged.

A Boy And His Dog



A far, far better treatment of man and dog was done by author and critic Harlan Ellison. His *A Boy and His Dog* tells the story of a young man and his genetically altered pet as they make their way through a post-apocalyptic world. The novella was made into a movie, and a quite good one at that. Both come highly recommended.



⚡ *Backbreaker's* views look great, but don't play great.

BACKBREAKER

Maybe next year

PS3 PRICE: \$49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: 505 Games
DEVELOPER: NaturalMotion Games

A blitzing linebacker knocks the ball from our quarterback's hand: *Fumble!* When our artificial-intelligence teammate recovers the ball and runs in the *wrong* direction, the result is a 43-yard loss. On the very next play we connect for a 49-yard touchdown. Bogus one moment, brilliant another—that, in a nutty pigskin shell, is *Backbreaker*.

The game's split personality extends to its features. There's no NFL license and, thus, no real-world teams or players, but the game allows for animations done on-the-fly, so every bump and tackle is unique. With the dramatic field-level camera views and innovative analog-stick-centric control system, we marveled at the immediacy of the gameplay: Flick the Right-analog stick up to launch a pass or perform a circular swipe to execute a run-breaking spin move. Simple. Intuitive. Fun.

Unfortunately, our command inputs didn't always result in their intended actions—lob pass attempts came out as bullet passes, or our runner would dive forward instead of juking. While the controls don't lack in precision per se, the challenge of

manipulating both analog sticks during play makes it a system that's difficult to execute precisely during the heat of competition.

Playing defense is more problematic. If the action unfolds away from the player-controlled defender, an X button press switches to the player best positioned to make the tackle or interception. The perspective shift is frequently disorienting and oftentimes occurs too late for an optimum stop.

While we appreciate *Backbreaker's* attempts at innovation, it's not quite ready for the pros. | Roger Burchill

Rating ★★★★★



⚡ Individual play is well-simulated, but executing effectively as a team is problematic.



↑ War Machine comes to Iron Man's aid—to no avail.

IRON MAN 2

More like a shiny tin person, actually

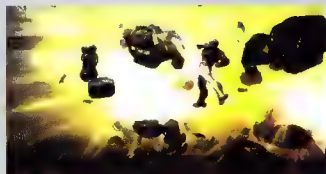
PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sega

Iron Man 2 presents a bundle of issues constantly retarding our efforts to enjoy any aspect of it.

The clunky gameplay is set around a jumpy and unintelligible story that leads playable characters Iron Man or War Machine through various military compounds fighting the same recycled robots in each level. The superheroes' capabilities are varied with long- and short-range ballistics and a selection of awkward melee combat moves. However, most combat strategies became superfluous once a couple of the generic ranged attacks were upgraded. Another chink in *Iron Man's* armor is the poor graphical quality. Each level and character is blanketed with low-resolution textures, which are painfully accentuated during cutscene close-ups.

After only a four-hour playthrough of the campaign and every poorly rendered suit unlocked, there was nothing left but to try deleting the experience from our memory bank. | David Murphy

Rating ★★★★★



↑ It's difficult to feel heroic when combating a seemingly endless series of bland robotic appliances.



MODNATION RACERS

It takes a (Mod)nation of millions...

PS3 PRICE: \$59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: United Front Games

Noted scholar, neurologist, and father of the modern psychoanalytic theory Sigmund Freud suggested man is motivated by two separate, competing drives: the creative and the destructive. To this, we would hazard Freud may have been in error, as clearly man is *also* motivated by the need to take a miniature kart, drive it up a ramp at a near-excessive speed, and jump it through a flaming hoop while performing an altogether unsafe 360- or, perhaps, 720-degree spin.

ModNation Racers hearkens back to the classics: *Mario Kart*, *Wacky Races*. It also summons up images of not-so-classic racers that nonetheless had awesome names, the *Furious Kartings* and the *Star Wars: Super Bombad Racings* of the world. In its pace and execution, *Racers* emerges squarely in the middle of these two camps, offering a fine

racing experience, but lacking that certain *je ne sais quoi* to rocket the title to the finish line in a wholly triumphant fashion.

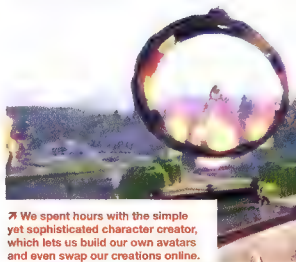
Custom Build

The game is built on a wonderful foundation of goofiness and a wealth of customization options. Players can use a series of simple in-game tools to create their own wacky racers, vehicles, and race courses, and it's no exaggeration to say the developers have focused their efforts here. With the tools, it's possible to drop an eerie facsimile of, say, *Peanuts* lovable *schlemiel* Charlie Brown into a tiny purple-and-green cardboard box and pit him against, say, his nemesis Lucy Van Pelt in a miniature version of an F1 race car.

As a tool for free expression, *Racers* shames the competition. Its customization options are abundant,

and players can easily lose themselves in the creation process. As a racing game, there is room for concern. The game has its heart in the right place, and understands the mechanics of the genre without perfectly replicating them.

Load times here are excessive, with individual races taking 45 to 50 seconds to start up, and for a game that embraces customization, *Racers* offers no option to modify its control scheme. While the controls serve their purpose adequately, the acceleration is mapped to the R2 trigger, and



7 We spent hours with the simple yet sophisticated character creator, which lets us build our own avatars and even swap our creations online.

→ Go Online, Young Man

To swipe liberally, it's good to play together. *ModNation Racers* gleefully encourages sharing photos, race tracks, character designs, and vehicles. The best creations are prominently featured in the game's modspot section, and players are free to download and tinker with other people's creations before jumping into online races.



❗ Powerups—a kart racing mainstay—are upgradeable in *ModNation Racers*.



since there's little need to do anything but jam on the gas, extended racing sessions are a recipe for index-finger cramping. Odder still: The rear-view peek is mapped to the face buttons, which might seem less punishing on the digits but, in practice, is awkward and relatively unintuitive.

Off-and-On Track

In-game, *Racers* does some odd things, instituting in-game load times complete with a shift to a red screen when a racer gets struck with a weapon or goes off-track. It may be forgivable in the latter instances, but in the former it's altogether intrusive and serves to pothole the experience. Any sort of immersion, any sort of momentum comes to a dead stop with these brief pauses—and coupled with a relentless (yet thankfully tunable) enemy artificial intelligence, the frustration meter can spike just as a driver streaks from first place to, say, sixth.

There is a decent, if hardly overwhelming sense of speed to the proceedings, and *Racers* does an excellent job of challenging players with both basic objectives and secondary goals. At times, drivers must smash stalls in a series of roadside markets, knock out a specific enemy, avoid crashing into walls, or perform mid-air spins to earn extra modifications and customization options. Beyond the notion of simply progressing by winning races, players

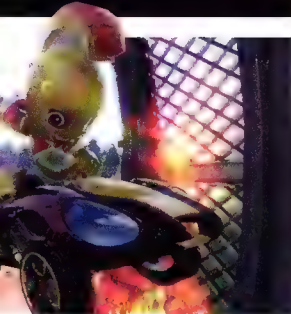
are duly motivated to collect cool stuff—and then put it to use on their driver, his race courses, and the sweet ride he rolls to victory in.

Themed courses await, and the designers here have done an excellent job of hinting at all the cool stuff players are free to create. Branching paths hide ramps with speed-augmenting rocket boosts to ensure a breathtaking launch up and over the competition. Driving over special hotspots can trigger traps; some activate huge car-crushing plungers

while others throw up barricades to deprive the enemy of shortcuts. A nice complement of powerups has been included and these are further upgradeable to the point where a simple rocket becomes a multi-warhead salvo capable of wiping out multiple karts or a speed burst becomes an adventure at warp eight. It's at these times, when all the cylinders are firing, that *Racers* finishes strong. | Greg Orlando

Rating ★★★★★

❗ Make your ride as sweet—and your character as creepy—as you want.



For the record, *Agarest* delivers a far different experience from what some of its visuals promise.



RECORD OF AGAREST WAR

Don't let the looks fool ya

PS3 PRICE: \$44.99 (PSN download) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Aksys Games DEVELOPER: Compile Heart/Red Ent

The main thing many people want to know about *Record of Agarest War* is: What's the ratio of sexy cartoons to strategy-role-playing game? Unfortunately, someone's going to be disappointed. Fans looking for anime pseudo-porn should stick to Googling "lesbian bondage hentai." As per usual.

Agarest breaks down to about 90 percent complex fantasy combat and 9 percent high-flown fantasy dialogue. Racy stuff makes up the remaining one percent of the experience (as compared to 80-odd percent of the marketing), but don't blame Aksys Games for knowing a good hook when it sees one.

So what's the real draw? As skirmish-scale strategy adventures go, *Agarest* is pretty well-made. It could have used more variety for fighting opponents (as the quest goes on, players find themselves repeatedly facing very similar encounters), but it's easy to fend off monotony by finding new and strange ways to exploit and abuse the combat system.

As with *Disgaea*, this game is meant to appeal to the kind of people who don't just want to win battles, but seek to overkill their opponents with

team-up moves, super attacks, special combos, and anything else that can be strung together to administer way more damage than necessary. The character development has just as much depth with a cleverly designed item-synthesis system that's woven throughout game.

For all Aksys' efforts to appeal to slightly different market, *Agarest*

is a gearhead's RPG. The story isn't especially involving and the romantic subplots aren't much more than an excuse for the occasional cheesecake shot, but in practice that's not much of a problem. Ninety percent of the time it's not even noticeable. | David F. Smith

Rating ★★★★★

What price War?

Agarest War is available for both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 systems. But whereas as the 360 version is a \$60 limited edition retail SKU and comes with a Yearning Ellis pillowcase and Sensual 3D Vira-Lorr mouse pad (we kid you not), the PS3 game is only available as a \$45 PSN download sans extras. That's either 15 bucks saved or sweet schwag lost, depending on your perspective.





Big eyes, pointy ears...
Yup, we're in a JRPG.

HEXYZ FORCE

Lacking some Sting

PSP PRICE: \$29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus USA DEVELOPER: Sting

Hexyz Force is an oddly conventional role-playing game. It's odd because it comes from Sting, the development shop specializing in quirky offerings like *Knights in the Nightmare*, the world's first and only strategy-role-playing game/bullet-hell shooter.

By comparison, this feels downright pedestrian and so straightforward that it's not necessary to pay much attention to the tutorials. Battles play out according to a simple turn-based system. The characters are another bunch of charming young big-eyed cartoons. The 3D dungeons have their share of traps and puzzles, but there's nothing so twisted as to confound newcomers to the RPG genre.

Force seems constructed from familiar parts, and the whole machine is smoothly tuned. The story moves forward at a brisk pace, and as players progress different plot threads begin interlocking in some surprising ways. (There are two separate quests to play through, which

overlap as the story unfolds.) Combat moves quickly too, and the difficulty level ramps up just sharply enough that it's dangerous to stop paying attention to the onscreen action.

Beneath the simpler gameplay systems, there's complexity waiting for savvy players to discover and exploit. Learning to manipulate a mess of elemental weaknesses leads to big damage and experience bonuses, while gathering a collection of seemingly useless items allows for the synthesis of powerful new weapons and equipment. It works a bit like the system in *Valkyrie Profile*—synthesized items eventually break and go away, so adventurers have to keep collecting stuff and cooking up new gear to stay well equipped.

Although it lacks the surprises or intrigue inherent to most Sting-developed games, *Hexyz Force* still manages to provide a satisfying experience for on-the-go RPGers. | David F. Smith



→ Uncredited Cameos

Wondering why a character suddenly walks on and walks off just as quickly without any explanation? It just may be the characters are meeting someone from the other half of *Hexyz Force*'s story. Play the other quest to discover who the heck that was and what he or she happened to be up to.



↑ Impact's gameplay may not be highlighting, but it delivers.

TNA IMPACT: CROSS THE LINE

Some of the right moves

PSP PRICE: \$29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SouthPeak Games DEVELOPER: Point of View

If *TNA Impact: Cross the Line* is to be believed, pro wrestlers rise meteorically, but are quickly cut down by the Machiavellian schemings of their peers. Found battered in Mexico, they somehow find themselves on a path to revenge involving traveling through a nationally televised program. Given pro-wrestling storylines, it's not that large of a leap of logic.

A PSP port of a two-year-old console game, *Line* presents great visuals, crisp animations, and a smartly placed camera that doesn't detract from the action. As the wrestlers go at it, little touches like their exaggerated reactions to attacks and realistic ring-rope physics really make the game pop.

Control-wise, the game is appreciably simple for most grapples and attacks. However, it hits a snag when too many specific functions are sourced to one button. Pressing the Circle button without context does nothing. However, in context, it initiates a submission move; executes a finisher; makes a grappler enter and leave the ring, climb the turnbuckle, jump to the suspended ropes in an Ultimate X match, and attempt a pin. Depending on when and where the context occurs, circumstances like a pin attempt that leads to exiting the ring can and will happen.

There's still some impact here, but the blow is certainly blunted. | Tony Barrett

Rating ★★★★★

Rating ★★★★★



Smite the enemy with powerful numerical digits.

PlayStation Network

Community | Strategy | PSN Reviews | PlayStation Store

10 Awesome discoveries in Just Cause 2

Andy Kelly



Try to hold off opening your parachute as long as possible.

The longer you fall, the more Chaos points you'll receive.

1 THE HIGHEST BASE JUMP

Head to the coordinates **X:20528 Y:11852** and you'll find yourself at the highest point of Panau Island: the snowy peak of a huge mountain. One of the game's hundred hidden Ular skulls is up here, but the real reason it's worth a visit is the thrill of jumping off the side into the misty abyss below. And the view is quite something, too.

LAST REMNANT It's details like this that make Panau Island a pleasure to explore.



2

THE ANCIENT RUINS

Head to **X:3909 Y:25071** and you'll find a large area of dusty desert filled with the remains of some ancient, long-gone civilization. At sunset it's remarkably beautiful, and a rare moment of calm in a game that's otherwise all about noise, distractions, and explosions. There are similar ruins dotted all over Panau, but this is the biggest. Maybe the ancient Panauan capital city?



FACE FACTS You only realize how big these faces are when you're standing beneath them.

3

THE HIDDEN ENEMY BASE

Well, maybe "hidden" isn't the right word. In true megalomaniacal dictator fashion, Pandak "Baby" Panay has carved his face, and those of his predecessors, into the side of a mountain. A garish monument to his presidency. Flip a switch outside and his mouth slides down, revealing an opulent domed base filled with cherry blossom trees. The final mission takes place here, but you can visit any time—just head to the following coordinates: **X:30375 Y:30637**.



HIGH FLYER It has no weapons, but makes up for it with high speed and great handling.

5

THE RACE TRACK

At **X:9170 Y:11413** you'll find this massive race track, complete with AI racers doing laps in vintage sports cars. Look around the pit area and you'll find some of the game's fastest autos parked under a series of tents. Regardless of the game's quirky handling, it's still fun doing a few laps of your own. Blow the other racers up when you get bored.



PRIZE RACER You could make a very pretty racing game with this engine.

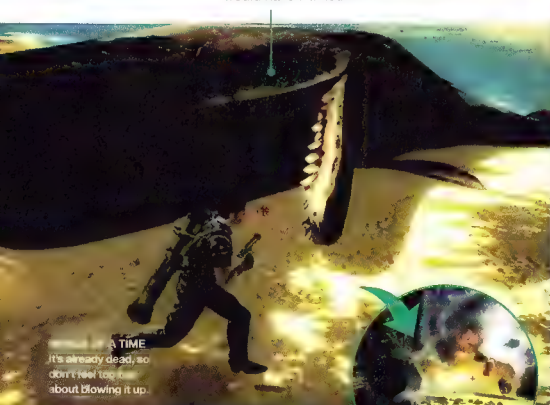
4

THE SECRET CHOPPER

In Panau City's skyscraper-filled financial district, at the coordinates **X:5904 Y:13693**, you'll find the tallest building in the game. Head to the roof—you can climb up there with your grappling hook, or bail out of a plane or chopper—and you'll find this tiny helicopter parked on a helipad. It's one of the nimblest, fastest aircraft on the island, and perfect for taking an air tour of the city. And while you're up there, grapple to the top of the nearby antenna for a particularly terrifying base jump.

6 THE WHALE

There's a sliver of beach at **X:29603 Y:31351** where you'll find the limp, rotting carcass of a beached whale. When you pass your crosshair over it, you'll notice it turns red, indicating it can be destroyed. Simply equip a rocket or grenade launcher, take aim and— from a safe distance—fire. The unfortunate animal will explode into a fountain of bone and blubber, revealing an armor upgrade box inside its cavernous rib cage. It's what he would have wanted.



7 THE HOT AIR BALLOON

Bored of planes and choppers? Then get your butt to **X:7397 Y:16150** for some vintage aviation. First, you have to shoot the weights off: look for the four sandbags attached to the basket. Then, when you get inside, press Triangle to ignite the burner and fill the balloon with hot air. You can control the direction of your drift by shifting your weight to each corner of the basket.



8 THE MILE-HIGH CLUB STRIP JOINT

Mark **X:29584 Y:11439** on your map. This is the Mile High Club, a floating fortress of smut and suggestive dancing. Aboard you'll find gyrating girls (and guys), a miniature runway with attached private jet, and an opportunity for an easy "I Believe I Can Fly" Trophy (for base jumping 1000 meters). Grapple up to the top of the balconies and leap off. Simple. You can't shoot the place down, unfortunately.


9 THE MYSTERY TANKER

A mysterious shipwreck can be found at **X:10437 Y:23499**—in the middle of the desert. This is likely a reference to Steven Spielberg's seminal science-fiction film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, where scientists find a similarly huge ship in the Mojave Desert. It could also be a reference to the Black Rock slave ship in *Lost*. Whatever the inspiration, it's another example of the game's incredible detail.

10

THE "LOST" ISLAND

Head to **X:1743 Y:4363** in a plane. You'll see an island in the distance, but as you begin your approach a violent thunderstorm will erupt. Then, no matter what aircraft you're in, you'll burst into flames and be forced to ditch. Explore the area and you'll find the wreckage of a passenger jet as well as a mysterious metal hatch. Hmm, it's a bit like that TV show. You know, the one with the island. You'll also hear strange noises, which you later learn come from a secret World War II weapon of mass destruction.



On approach it looks peaceful enough.

THUNDER ROAD But a lightning storm suddenly strikes, destroying the peaceful atmosphere.

THE ONES WE DIDN'T PICK...

FAKE SHARK

There's a small lagoon at **X:12895 Y:22595** where you'll notice a shark's fin poking out of the water, moving in circles. But when you dive beneath the water you'll notice it's actually just a motor with a fake fin attached. Weird.

BUBBLE GUN

Look around **X:4245 Y:25978** for a bell tower among some trees with white leaves. Climb up with your grappling hook and you'll find a "special" weapon: a green plastic pistol that fires bubbles and does no damage. Not the most useful gun in the game.



The remains of other crashed planes litter the island.



PlayStation Network Games



Section 8

PS3 PRICE: \$29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: TimeGate Studios DEVELOPER: TimeGate Studios

+ With so many excellent online multiplayer-focused first-person shooters available, it's easy to see how a game like *Section 8* might get overlooked. The generic space marine aesthetic has been done to death, and there's not a lot about the overall look and design that makes it

stand out. But the tight, intense, and engaging gameplay kept us coming back for more.

As a heavily armored space warrior, there are numerous selectable weapon loadouts that can be switched on-the-fly at battlefield supply stations. The ability to switch roles and tactics in the midst of battles stands out as a highlight. We also enjoyed experimenting with the super-speed charge and run, launching ourselves high into the air with a rocket pack, and

deploying turrets and other helpful depots to create defensive positions.

The short solo campaign is a decent primer to learn the subtle gameplay nuances, though multiplayer is where the real action lies. The sprawling maps with numerous drop zones and contestable capture points make the 32 battles a pleasantly chaotic affair. Even if it's not strong enough to top the best AAA shooters, *Section 8* offers plenty of fire- and staying power. | Nathan Meunier



Hamsterball

PS3 PRICE: \$9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: TikiGames DEVELOPER: TikiGames

+ Originality is not *Hamsterball*'s strongest suit. Still, it possesses quite a few levels of furbal rolling entertainment. The game had us sending a plastic-ball-ensconced hamster barreling through colorful 3D obstacle courses that grew more warped and winding as we progressed. There's a familiar but enjoyable *Super Monkey Ball* vibe about the whole critter-tormenting affair. However, the game shines brightest in the Isometric Stunt and Trial modes that rip off *Marble Madness*. Copycat syndrome aside, *Hamsterball* is an adept time thief. | NM

PSone Fun

Can't miss classics — now available on PSN



Mass Destruction

PS3/PSP | PRICE: \$5.99 | ESRB: TEEN

Tanks are great. More specifically they're great for blowing the snot out of everything in sight, which is what this game is all about.



Magic Carpet

PS3/PSP | PRICE: \$5.99 | ESRB: EVERYONE

This first-person flying-carpet RPG lets us build castles, battle monsters, and fling spells while zipping around the kingdom.



TNN Motorsports Hardcore 4x4

PS3/PSP | PRICE: \$5.99 | ESRB: EVERYONE

Get ready to tear up the track in this straightforward off-road racer. Six vehicles offer ample means to play in the dirt.



Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries of Little Riddle, Episodes 1-3

PS3 PRICE: \$14.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Relentless Software DEVELOPER: Relentless Software

+ Loaded with gobs of silly British charm, the first three episodes of the *Blue Toad Murder Files* get off to a great start. The kickoff of this cartoonish "whodunit" puzzle adventure series sees the detective agency's much-needed vacation to the quaint village of Little Riddle grind to a halt when the mayor is shot and killed in front of everyone. Uncovering the gunman in a village full of unusual folks isn't as easy as it sounds, and things only get worse.

As far as adventures games go, this series is a very different animal. The plot flows as if it's on rails. We're essentially an audience for the oddball character interactions and the laughable musings of the marvelously voiced narrator until we're called on periodically to engage in problem-solving activities and puzzles.

Paying attention to what's going on in the story is crucial, since there are numerous instances where random details play directly into the puzzles.

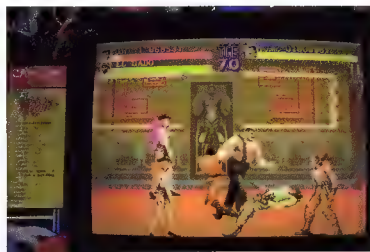
Some involved recalling the names and details of specific individuals; others were more demanding of our mental prowess, particularly when cracking written code and converting English currency. The challenges can get quite tough, but never become permanent roadblocks. It's also amusing to be chastised by the funny narrator for wrong answers. With two murders and a burglary, episodes 1 through 3 set the stage for more she-nanigans to come. We approve. | NM



Wakeboarding HD

PS3 PRICE: \$14.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: CREAT Studios DEVELOPER: TiKGames

— Being dragged along on water by a speedboat is a lot more enjoyable when we're encouraged to smash into buildings, leap off insane ramp jumps, grind random rails, and make vacationers dive into the drink to get out of our way. *Wakeboarding HD* is a good-looking game that doesn't take itself too seriously. There are many mission challenges to try to unlock and a lot of content to explore, but rigid, unforgiving controls and painful load times ultimately make the arcade-style gameplay wipeout. | NM



Final Fight: Double Impact

PS3 PRICE: \$9.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

+ This classic brawling double feature packs a big punch with the hit beat-'em-up *Final Fight* and the hack-and-slash wizardry of *Magic Sword*. Both arcade classics are back in their full original glory, and playing them in the retro-stylized simulated arcade-style cabinet definitely brings back memories. Unlimited continues make it possible to delve far deeper into the games than we could afford to in the days of yore, and unlockable achievements offer new rewards for beating up on the same old baddies. *Double Impact* is teeming with awesome '80s arcade nostalgia. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store



Heavy Rain Chronicles The Taxidermist

PRICE: \$4.99 | ESRB: Mature
Another unnerving vignette in the same creepy style as the main game, *The Taxidermist* offers a brief but thrilling new chapter with multiple endings to explore.



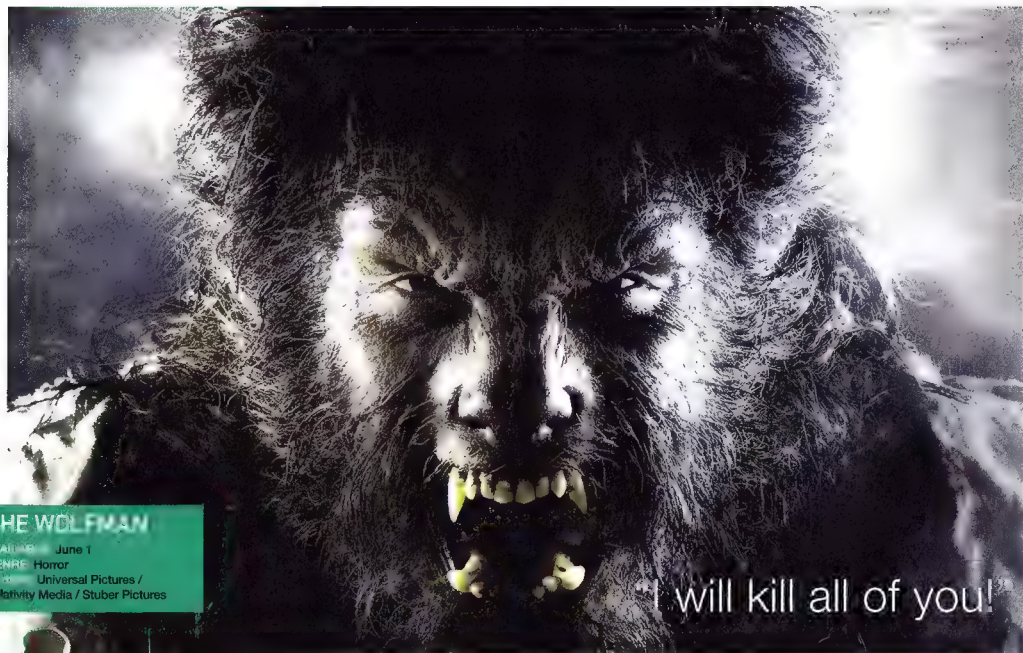
Army of Two: The 40th Day Chapters of Deceit

PRICE: \$3.99 | ESRB: Mature
A few extra hours of bro-slaying in two campaign levels, *Collateral Damage* and *The Assassination*, should be enough to satiate the itchy trigger fingers.



Aliens vs. Predator Multiplayer Swarm Map Pack

PRICE: \$6.99 | ESRB: Mature
The slaughterfest among Colonial Marines, Aliens, and Predator hunters continues on this map pack's four new areas.



THE WOLFMAN

AVAILABLE June 1
 GENRE Horror
 Universal Pictures /
 Relativity Media / Stuber Pictures

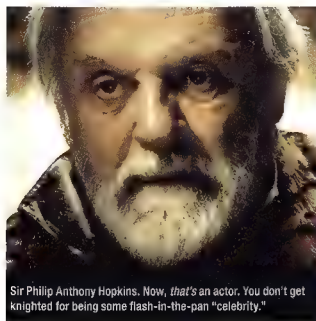
"I will kill all of you!"

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

Back in the day—before MTV's *Jersey Shore* became the new face of horror—there was nothing scarier than a man transformed to raging wolf by the cold light of a full moon. This updating of the classic 1941 horror film *The Wolf Man* seeks to recapture the terror of yesteryear with an all-star cast of Anthony Hopkins and Benicio Del Toro and healthy doses of bloody, savage violence. Of course, when Del Toro's character returns to his childhood homestead to investigate his brother's murder, he discovers there's something worse than being a lycanthrope: the family reunion.

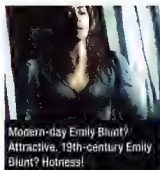
Why We're Watching



Sir Philip Anthony Hopkins. Now, *that's* an actor. You don't get knighted for being some flash-in-the-pan "celebrity."



Never pass on an opportunity to see the work of make-up master extraordinaire, Rick Baker.



Modern-day Emily Blunt? Attractive, 19th-century Emily Blunt? Hotness!



We've finally recovered from the most horrific werewolf movie of all time: 1985's *Teen Wolf*.



According to the *Orlando Santina's* Roger Moore, "Del Toro gives his least mumbly performance in years." This we've got to hear.

Top VDS Downloads

THIS MONTH'S TOP VDS:

- Avatar
- The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus
- The Drown Together
- Movie: The Movie!
- Iron Man
- Transylvania

THIS MONTH'S TOP VDS:

- House: Season 6
- 24: Season 8
- Smallville: Season 9
- Chuck: Season 3
- Breaking Bad: Season 3



↑ "Tail? What tail? I have no idea what you're talking about."

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Letters



▲ This month's conversation starter

DEPT. OF WAIT UNTIL SHE READS THIS

"My wife was ready to give birth! But I managed to get in some PSP play." ➡

Send your comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. Or we'll be forced to run swear words and naughty pictures of Bea Arthur to fill space.

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows: You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

CLEAN UP YOUR ACT, PART I...

I was curious as to whether or not you guys could reduce the amount of cursing and women pictures? I'm only for 14 years old and I love your magazine, but my parents cut out or mark up any pictures or swear words in your magazine! My little brother loves the magazine so much, he will hide from our parents while reading it! | *Noah Current, Parts Unknown*

NOAH, MEET WENDY

Is there an M-rating for your magazine I don't know about? I thought readers of various ages read your magazine? I intercept the magazine issues I subscribe to for my son and am growing increasingly appalled by some of it. I am referring to the article "Top Ten Moments in *Heavy Rain*" and the photographs provided.

Sony releases games with a fairly reliable rating system. Maybe the magazine needs a rating system of its own for consumers. If I wanted my son to know and see that much about *Heavy Rain* I would have allowed him to purchase it. A *God of War* article in a past issue was accompanied with a photograph of the main character in bed with several women. I removed that article. I also go though the magazine to seek out various advertisements depicting nude women (with private parts covered with a bar—a useless feature). I'm seriously considering canceling the two subscriptions I

hold with PTOM as well as informing other parents about the magazine's contents. Your magazine should "test its own morals" if any. This magazine needs to be more considerate of the varied age groups that open its issues. | *Wendy Pulver, Naples, NY*
Wendy, we applaud your efforts. Parents need to monitor what their kids are watching and reading, and you seem to be on the ball.

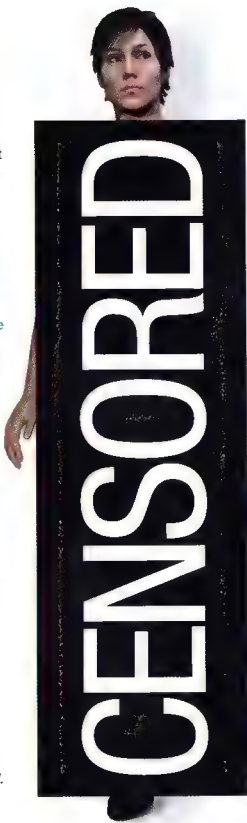
We strive to cover all facets of the PlayStation experience—and that includes M-rated titles. We'll sometimes use pictures that may not be appropriate for small children, although we're not *Playboy*, and we'll never show full nudity. We'll also use rough language sometimes, which we should really tone down because our moms read this magazine, too.

As for you, Noah, thank your parents for caring. And then hit them up for more allowance. We find threatening to hold your breath works awesomely.

DATES "R" US

I am a loyal PlayStation owner and have only purchased PlayStation products starting with the original PlayStation. My oldest son safely returned from Iraq but with an Xbox 360. I naturally refused to play it, but got suckered into playing *Left 4 Dead*.

It was okay, but I quickly tired of running around shooting with no real plot. My youngest son, however, is



LETTER OF THE MONTH

HOW TO WIN THE LOTM AWARD

I have a sweet PSP picture and was wondering if you can publish it in the magazine. This is the only email address I could find seeing as how I don't have a copy of the magazine around, because I had to rush to the hospital. My wife was ready to give birth! It was some crazy times, but I managed to get in some PSP play. Anyways, here he is... | *Carlos Perez, Kissimmee, FL*
If you think that we at PlayStation: The Official Magazine will be tricked into giving you the coveted letter of the month award because...
awwwwww...what a cute baby! Here, have the coveted Letter of the Month award, which comes with all manner of free stuff for you and your very adorable son.



15 and LOVES running around shooting zombies. So here is my problem. He has a birthday coming in July. He wanted an Xbox 360 but I told him that was too big a ticket item for his birthday, and something like that was more a Christmas gift. The real reason was that I feel extremely guilty, but I can't justify buying another PlayStation just for my son to use. If I buy him the Xbox for Christmas, how bad will my punishment be from the Sony gods? Should I just let him play my PlayStation and hopes he forgets about my promise?

P.S. I'm 41, and single. Do you know of any employed men between 35 and 45 who enjoy science fiction and videogames to hook me up with? Is Gary single? That would be awesome. | *Melody Monteiro, East Liverpool, OH*

We'll let you in on a little secret, Melody: We at PTOM own Xboxes and Dreamcasts and Wiis and Nintendo DSes and, in his sordid donut-fueled purple haze days, Gary was once seen sidetalking on an N-Gage. We are game fans, and while PlayStation systems are by far our favorites, we love playing awesome titles no matter what console they're made for. So buy your son what he wants, and guilt be damned.

Also, Gary is happily married. Further, all the single, available guys

we know are into dating female Hulk Hogan impersonators or are too busy writing *Manimal* fan fiction. Maybe one of our readers fits your requirements? Anyone?

FORCING THE ISSUE

Wouldn't it be great to have a *Star Wars* game that uses the PlayStation Move? Think of it—you could wave Sony's motion controller around as you play a Jedi. | *Ricky Kimsey, Parts Unknown*

We posed this question to the fine folk at LucasArts who, oddly (and politely), declined to comment. So, then, we went to our backup in these matters, the Magic 8-Ball.

Old Eighty says it's a sure thing, although it also routinely predicts we'll be eaten by giant insects or crushed between the gears of life's cruel machinery.

TWO MINUS THREE EQUALS NEGATIVE FUN

I have a couple of suggestions for your reviews section. How about mentioning the length of a playthrough and replayability?

Take the review for *Final Fantasy XIII*. I know most role-playing games take quite a while to play through (like 30-plus hours), and most also have optional sidequests. Does the linear play of *XIII* also mean shorter playthroughs? There is also no mention of sidequests in the review. I think reviews should also include a mention of the time it takes to play the game through without any sidequest or games that aren't required to finish the game. Reviews should also give an idea how many sidequests there are.

Another issue is replayability. Once you finish a game like *FFXIII*, is there any incentive to play through it again?

One last thing. Were there any Lord Fools pranks in the April 2010 issue?

Grand Theft Auto IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony and *Dead or Alive: Paradise* spring to mind... | *Al Metz, Parts Unknown*

Reviews are a very tricky and cunning beast, Al, and we're always looking to improve the way we at this here penny gazette critique games.

One of the things we don't want to do is suggest to readers that more equals better. The length of time it takes to complete a game has no relation to its quality. The same can be said about replay value—a metric ton of games afford opportunities to replay a wholly crappy game in an entirely new way.

At its heart, a review should tell you what a game looks like, and what it feels like to play. It should explain why a game succeeds or fails without reading like a checklist, or resorting to some vaguely mathematical formula to arrive at a final score.

Also, the games you mentioned? They're real. We've yet to play any April Fool's pranks at PTOM, save for the time we froze the intern in carbonite and shipped him off to the vile gangster Jabba the Hutt. Boy, we predict his face will be red if he's ever thawed out.

ANOTHER READER WANTS A JOB

Do you guys have a job for me over there as a game tester? I'm just saying the way I go through games, and how good I am at playing them, it should be my profession. | *Nicholas Leandro, Parts Unknown*

Testing videogames is a good way to get your foot in the door, which will then be slammed shut by some heartless megaconglomerate, leaving you with a bloody stump.

Also, if you read our "Testing the Mettle" feature story in last month's issue, you no doubt know game testing is not all about beating games quickly—or at all.

1

Manimal references in PlayStation: The Official Magazine. There will be more.

35

Pounds lost by Roger on his way to professional hunkdom. Way to go, Roger!

99

Problems of the PTOM staffers, and not a one associated with women.

Correction Box



Apologies to Activision's senior producer Meghan Morgan, who was incorrectly identified as Meghan Morgan in last issue's "Tangled Web" article. The writer has been shot out of a cannon.

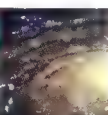


Et Cetera All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Gigante's | Pizza | Worth every penny
Gigante's makes pizza. This is no measly-mouthed crapstaple of a pizza, but rather a superpizza infused by the ultimate in awesomeness. Gigante's is heaven on Earth, found in Greg's home town, Oceanside, NY.



Demonstration 2010 | Album | Free
Scott's favorite Indiana-based pop punk trio Good Luck recently posted a fantastic (and free) four-song EP right here: Tinyurl.com/GoodLuckEP. Rock out for free or donate directly to the band...and maybe get lucky when the band tours this summer.



Breaking Bad | TV show | AMC Network
Forget *Mad Men*. When Roger wants a dose of the truly insane on the AMC network, he turns to *Breaking Bad* instead. Who better to be a role model than a meth-cooking, home-wareheaded high school chemistry teacher?



The Last Airbender | Movie | \$10-ish

Roger's dog's name is Appa. Can you tell he's an Avatar fan? As such, Roger's claimed prime Cineplex-line real estate in anticipation of M. Night Shyamalan's live-action adaptation of the animated series, which opens July 2. But please, M., recapture your *Sixth Sense* magic.





Available June 8!

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Qore Episode 25

We scour the globe to bring you the hottest news

Summer is heating up and so is our coverage of the hottest games. Lara Croft is back with a whole new angle and this time she has a partner! We travel to Japan to find out what those wildly creative developers at Q-Games are up to with the *PixelJunk* franchise. *Green Day: Rock Band* brings the punk rock icons onto your PS3. *Clash of the Titans* brings the epic tale to the console and there's much more in this episode of Qore.

—Veronica Belmont



1 Qore featuring Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light. 2 Meet Qore's host, Veronica Belmont. 3 Billy Joe featured in *Green Day: Rock Band*. 4 Upcoming Blu-ray movies and games. 5 *PixelJunk Shooter 2* from Q-Games. 6 Centaur from *Clash of the Titans*. 7 *Clash of the Titans*' version of Cerberus.

Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for \$2.99 an episode, or \$24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content.

*Content subject to change.



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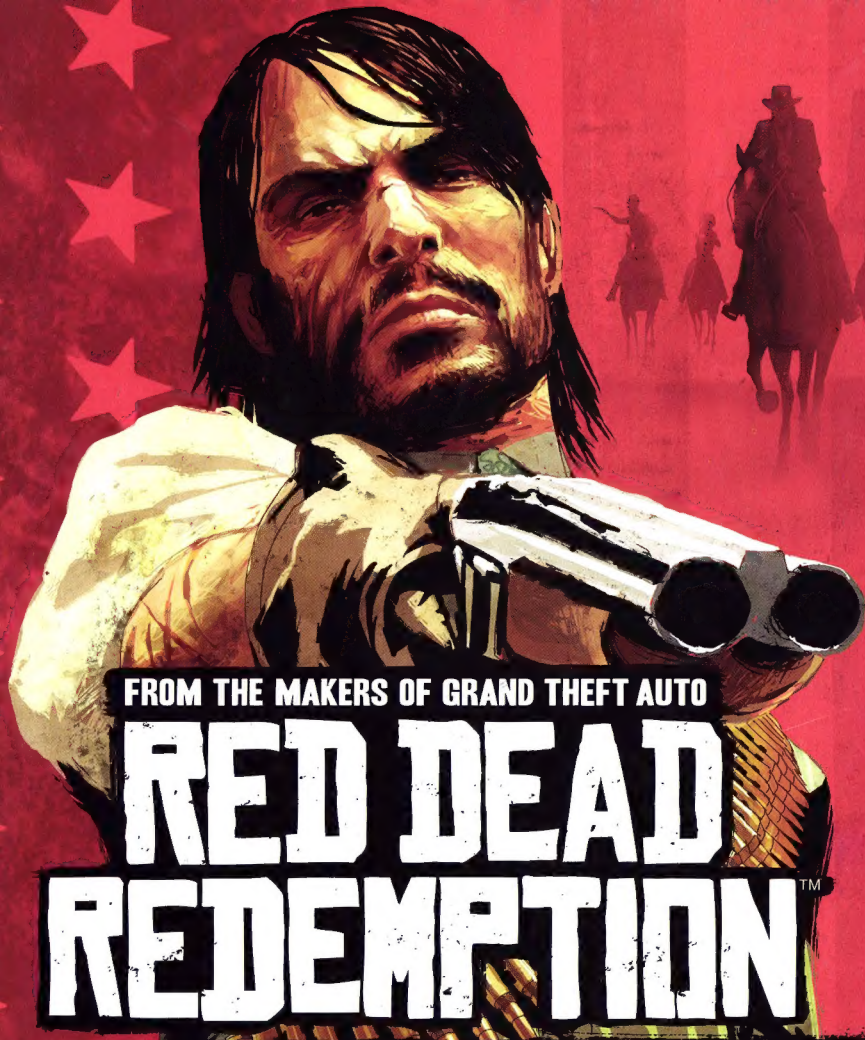
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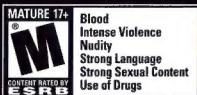


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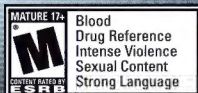
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